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# CONSCIENCE

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John Padipurackal

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# jeevadhara

A JOURNAL FOR SOCIO-RELIGIOUS RESEARCH

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## Conscience

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## Editorial

Human life situation is so complex that it demands strenuous effort from the part of the believer to take appropriate decision on several matters. Statements such as "real social and cultural transformation whose repercussions are felt too on the religious level" (*Gaudium et Spes*=GS; GS 4.1), reveal the Church's awareness of the precarious human condition today. GS considers the exposition of the human situation inevitable for its teaching on social issues (cfr. GS 4-10). Conscience is the human's all important aid in analyzing and evaluating situations, however problematic they are, and taking decisions about personal and social matters. Trusting in conscience individuals can take part in a common venture for the search of truth (cfr. GS16). Recent Church documents such as *Veritatis Splendor* and *Fides et Ratio* also point to the role of conscience not only in ethical deliberations but also in matters of faith. Primacy of conscience, as it is well known, is the teaching of Sacred Scripture (Rom.2:14-16).

The present issue of *Jeevadhara* devotes itself to a discussion on Conscience as there are diverse and differing approaches to conscience. Approaches differ not only in defining conscience, but also in questions regarding its formation, autonomy, relation to authority and so on. We hope that the contributions to this number will shed light on some important problems.

Caesar D'Mello commences his article: *The Formation of Conscience* with a discussion on the scriptural and philosophico-theological data provided by the Catholic tradition. After explaining this rich tradition he takes us to profound insights propounded by modern psychologists.

S. Arokiasamy in his article *Conscience and Relational Humanum* proposes the relational perspective of humanity to explain conscience in order to respond to the challenges of our times, namely, marginalization, oppression and exclusion and to work towards human solidarity. This is to evolve a praxis of inclusion to create an interconnected, interrelated and interdependent humanity. This procedure definitely transcends the traditional abstract and conceptual approach to conscience.

Mathew Illathuparampil presents an important topic that has been debated in ethical fora for several decades, namely autonomy of conscience. In his article, *Autonomy of Conscience: Dialectics between the Subjective and Objective Poles*, the writer takes us to the manifold facets of the issue in question. Autonomy ordinarily is understood as independence from others. But Mathew Illathuparampil explains how autonomy cannot ignore its dialectical relationship with heteronomy. The tension between the subjective and objective poles of morality is understandable. The writer makes it clear that it is a creative and responsible tension.

In his article *Conscience in Communion*, Paulachan Kochappilly explains the primacy of one's 'inner voice', which is none other than one's conscience. The writer states that there are people who follow their conscience closely in every walk of life. People who are in communion with values – both temporal and eternal founded on truth – will be communicating them and will be committed to the community towards deeper communion. They offer models for generations down through the human history.

Anjali Therese in her article *Conflict of Conscience: An Activist's Viewpoint* analyses the age-old, but ever recurring issue, namely, conflict of conscience. Why does conflict of conscience arise? Due to conflicting demands of the cultural world; due to conflicting religious and ethical demands; due to indispensable choice between two or more evil options; and finally due to one's conflict with authority. The writer tries to introduce the manifold aspects of the problem, rather than proposing solutions to the issue in question. The concern of the moral theologian must be to make the believer aware of the conflict and enable him to make appropriate choice.

The richness of the Indian thinking is an unquestionable factor in the discussion on conscience also. Baiju Julian introduces us to the age-old wisdom of Indian cultural and religious ethos on conscience in his article *The Hindu Religious Perspective of Conscience*. The article tries to expose the progressive understanding of the concept of 'Inner controller' or conscience in the Indian religious and cultural milieu especially in the teaching of the *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and *Bhagavadgita*.

We hope that these articles will adequately express the dignity and sanctity of the human conscience – one's most secret core, and sanctuary', where 'one is alone with God whose voice echoes in one's depths' (GS 16).



# The Formation of Conscience

Caesar D'Mello

This article deals with *Formation of Conscience* in four Sections, viz. 1) explains what Old and New Testaments have to say about it; 2) examines the relationship between Super Ego and Conscience; 3) discusses what some psychologists as Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, Paul Philibert, Carol Gilligan, Craig Dykstra and Erik Erikson say about the development of Conscience, and 4) explains what Walter Conn understands by Conscience. The author of the article Dr. Caesar D'Mello is teaching Moral Theology at Pius College, Goregon, Bombay.

The Second Vatican Council triggered a new interest in Moral Theology and specially suggested that theology could be enriched by inter-disciplinary studies. This paper looks at the findings of some psychologists and those who have conducted cross-cultural studies on the Moral Development of children. The fruits of this research help to throw light on some key concepts in Moral Theology. In this paper I will limit myself to the process of Conscience Formation. It has four sections. The *first section* begins by looking at what the Old Testament has to say about conscience. It does not actually use the word "conscience" but deals graphically with the reality of conscience in the account of the Fall of our First parents. In the New Testament, Paul uses the word conscience 25 times and highlights the different aspects of conscience. The history of conscience is dealt with very briefly, concentrating on important contributions from Thomas Aquinas, Kant and Freud. The *second section* deals with the relationship between the Super-Ego and Conscience. Robert Glaser explains well the difference between the Freudian notion of the Super-Ego and Conscience. Louis Monden speaks of three stages of conscience: Childhood, Adolescence and Adult. These are not necessarily chronological but Monden explains

that one's notions of God, Sin, Contrition and Repentance correspond to the stage one. The *third section* of the paper deals with Piaget's stages of Cognitive Development and later developed by Kohlberg into 6 stages of Moral Development. Paul Philibert, Carol Gilligan and Craig Dykstra point out certain lacunae in Kohlberg's stages of Moral Development. In contrast, there are the eight stages of Psycho-Social Development in the Human Life Cycle as explained by Erik Erikson. The *fourth section* takes up Walter Conn's understanding of conscience. Walter Conn bases his idea of conscience on Reinhold Niebuhr and Bernard Lonergan. I end with some concluding observations.

## I. Scripture

There is no single Hebrew word which expresses the idea of conscience, and the Greek word occurs in the OT only in Wisdom 17: 11. This book composed in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, is influenced by the terminology of Greek philosophy. The reality of conscience as a judgment of the morality of an act to be performed or the recognition that an act already performed is morally bad is not found in the OT. The "pangs of conscience" are described with artistic skill in the account of the Fall of Adam & Eve (Gen 3). The Hebrew word which most nearly expresses the idea of conscience is the word "heart".

In the NT, the word *syneidesis* occurs 25 times in the Pauline writings. The word in the meaning of conscience is derived from Stoic philosophy. In Stoicism, conscience which is the ultimate and autonomous judge of one's own acts, is the root of the independence of the sage. Paul adopted the word with something of the Stoic notion of independence rooted in a good conscience. Substantially, however, his idea of one's personal judgment of moral good and evil reposes upon OT and Gospel conceptions of sin.

We shall look at some of the ways in which Paul uses the word conscience to highlight different aspects of conscience :

1. Conscience i.e. the awareness of the difference between moral good and evil, bears witness against the Gentiles, who show this awareness that they have the law written in their hearts. (Rm 2:15)
2. Christians should submit to civil power not only because of the fear of its wrath but also because of the obligation of conscience. (Rm 13:5)



3. Some Christians have a "weak" conscience, i.e. they think it is sinful to eat meat offered to idols, when it is not; and those whose conscience is "strong" i.e. better informed, have the duty of not leading those weaker consciences into sin. They should abstain from their liberty in order to avoid scandal. (1 Cor 8:7,10,12)

4. Where the word *syneidesis* is used in the NT, it is most frequently accompanied by "good", "pure" "clear". Paul is aware of the possibility of a good conscience which is in sincere error; Christian charity demands that we tolerate this weakness until the conscience can be better instructed.<sup>1</sup>

For Lehmann, Paul brought about a "notable shift of semantic perspective which not only drew the conscience into the orbit of the Old Testament understanding of heart but made the conscience instrumental to the dynamics and direction of God's humanizing activity in the world in Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup> Paul was able to bring about a revolution in the ethical role and significance of conscience.

### A Brief History of the Development of Conscience

The rich foundation in NT for a theological teaching on conscience was not followed up by the Church Fathers. We find numerous single statements and opinions, especially in Tertullian, Origen, Chrysostom, and more details in Augustine, who describes especially the religious function of conscience.

In the middle ages, Thomas Aquinas calls the *synderesis*, the permanent natural *habitus* of the primary moral principles, "conscientia" the actual judgment of conscience arrived at by way of conclusion.<sup>3</sup> Paul Lehmann, in his book *Ethics and the Christian Conscience* explains St. Thomas' view on Conscience.

"The first principles of moral action are known to all men without deliberation. But the behavioral implementation of this knowledge requires

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1 Cfr. McKenzie J. L., sj, *Dictionary of the Bible*, Bruce Publishing Co., Milwaukee, 1965, p 147

2 Lehmann Paul, *Ethics in a Christian context*, Harper & Row, N.Y., 1963, p. 327

3 Rahner K., SJ, Ed, *Sacramentum Mundi*, An Encyclopedia of Theology, TPI, Bangalore, 1975 p. 413

a kind of liaison between the principle and any given action. What a man knows together with himself is that this or that particular, freely chosen action is in accordance with natural law. Conscience is, thus, the bond between law and responsibility.”<sup>4</sup>

In *De Veritate*, St. Thomas speaks of the way in which Conscience functions :

“Insofar as knowledge is applied to an act, as directive of that act, conscience is said to prod or urge or bind. But, insofar as knowledge is applied to an act, by way of examining things which already have taken place, conscience is said to accuse or cause remorse when that which has been done is found to be out of harmony with the knowledge according to which it is examined; or to defend or excuse when that which has been done is found to have proceeded according to the form of the knowledge.”<sup>5</sup>

Conscience can then, be said to fulfill a double function: negative of accusing or causing remorse and positive of defending or excusing.

For the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, Conscience was “duty’s inner citadel”. He spoke of the starry heavens above conscience or the moral law within. For Immanuel Kant, the legal significance of conscience as an internal voice of external authority assumes importance.

There appears to be a certain ambiguity in Freud’s attempt to explain the origin and formation of conscience. The ambiguity stems from a fluctuation between internal psychic responses and external social pressures in Freud’s use of the term conscience. For Freud, conscience is identified with the superego, which functions as a negative censor, judging and condemning. It would look as though Freud has replaced the ethical role of conscience with a psychoanalytic one.<sup>6</sup>

## II. The Difference Between Super-ego and Conscience

John W. Glaser in a well argued article explains clearly the chief differences between Freud’s understanding of the Super-Ego and the traditional understanding of Conscience. The differences can be highlighted in the following schematic way :

4 Lehmann Paul, *Ethics in a Christian context*, Harper & Row, N.Y., 1963, pp 328-330

5 Quoted in *ibid.* pp 331-332, from *De Veritate*, Q. 17, art 1, Reply

6 Cfr Lehmann, *Ethics*, p. 342

*Super-Ego*

1. issues commands
2. is past-oriented
3. centripetal, turned in on oneself
4. oriented towards the authority-figure
5. great disproportion between the guilt experienced and the value in question.

*Conscience*

- invites to action and love  
 is future-oriented  
 centrifugal, centred on the value  
 oriented towards the value  
 experience of guilt is proportionate to the value in question.<sup>7</sup>

Even though John Glaser highlights the differences between the Super-Ego and Conscience, he would admit that during childhood the two are indistinguishable since the child internalizes prohibitions and injunctions of significant persons.

Glaser gives an interesting example to highlight the difference between Super-Ego and Conscience. A teacher takes his students for an outing. One of the boys complains that his purse has been stolen. That night the teacher has a camp-fire. He tells the boys that he is going to pass around a bowl of water. Each one is to sip from the bowl. The person who has stolen the purse will not be able to drink and will choke on the water. One of the boys does choke. Later the same boy confesses that he had stolen the purse. Glaser points out that the "choking" was the effect of the Super-Ego rather than that of Conscience.

David H. Jones, in his doctoral dissertation on "Freud's Theory of Moral Conscience" argues that Freud often used moral terminology ambiguously to describe and explain non-moral phenomena. Freud often spoke of *conscience*, *morality* and the *feeling of guilt*, when he was describing such non-moral phenomena as *the operation of the super-ego*, *repression*, and the *feeling of anxiety*. It is this ambiguous use of moral terminology (which Freud himself explicitly recognized) which in large measure is responsible for the erroneous interpretation of his theory of the super-ego.<sup>8</sup>

One of those who attempted to plot the stages of a person's moral growth and development in Louis Monden, in his book, "*Sin, Liberty and Law*".

7 Glaser J., *Conscience and Superego: A key distinction*, in *Theological Studies*, 32 (1971) p 34

8 Jones D.H., *Freud's Theory of Moral Conscience*, in Donnelly J. & Lyons L. Eds. *Conscience*, Alba House, NY, 1973, p. 86



## Three Stages of Conscience (Louis Monden)

<i>Instinctual Level</i> (Childhood)	<i>Moral Level</i> (Adolescence)	<i>Christian-Religious Level</i> (Adulthood)
<p><i>God</i></p> <p>Is seen as a police-man, who Takes me to task when I do Wrong.</p>	<p>Is the Alpha &amp; Omega, the Un caused Cause.</p>	<p>GOD IS UNCONDITIONAL LOVE.</p>
<p><i>Law</i></p> <p>Comes not from within But from without, prohibitions &amp; taboos</p>	<p>No longer external pressures. Law is a person's essential growth as a possibility and a task to be fulfilled.</p>	<p>A yielding to a God who is closer to me than myself. An invitation to love and a total donation.</p>
<p><i>Obligation</i></p> <p>Is felt as something alien, hostile to a person's instinctive impulses.</p>	<p>Man owes it to himself to be faithful to his authentic self-development.</p>	<p>No longer a duty, a vocation rather than an obligation</p>
<p><i>Conscience</i></p> <p>An ambivalent feeling, an instinctive warning.</p>	<p>Deciding what promotes self-realization and what stands in the way</p>	<p>Love itself as a power of discriminating what can promote from what will hinder its growth</p>
<p><i>Sin</i></p> <p>A material transgression of some prohibition or taboo. A blind feeling rather than consciousness of guilt.</p>	<p>Freely chosen infidelity to authentic self-realization &amp; free yielding to a pseudo-value.</p>	<p>Consists in saying NO to love. Sin a person himself in relation of refusal to love.</p>
<p><i>Guilt</i></p> <p>Stems from an awareness of having acted wrongly, faultily or against some order.</p>	<p>There is guilt where the free-will acts against conscience.</p>	<p>A merely material transgression can never be a sin.</p>

<p><i>Contrition</i></p> <p>The instinctive urge to escape the consequences of transgression. Looks for formulae, rites and magic gestures to undo the transgression.</p>	<p>Inner acknowledgment of an action as self-negation, the uttering of a verdict of guilty over one's own deviations.</p>	<p>An awareness of our unfaithfulness to love. A love that surpasses infidelity, God is greater than our hearts.</p>
<p><i>Confession</i></p> <p>Is like a washing machine, it belongs to the conjuring rites.</p>	<p>One of the means to be used for recovery. To restore and make up for the missed occasions of self-development.</p>	<p>Opening word of a dialogue, of an encounter. Making real on the level of moral growth what already is a reality on the religious level in the one creative moment of love.</p>

A young mother has given birth to a deformed baby. The way in which the mother thinks indicates which level she is at:

<p>"It is better to let this child die. It can grow up only for a life which will be a hell, it will not know one moment of happiness."</p>	<p>"Have I a right to interfere with this life which has been entrusted to me? Have I a right to say human life has no meaning."</p>	<p>"Every life means an invitation to grow in loving intimacy with God, and every human being In the shelter of love one can find strength to fulfill his own task."</p>
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Louis Monden explains that the three stages of childhood, adolescence and adulthood are not really chronological stages. They represent stages of moral growth and development. It is possible to have an adolescent who may be at the adult level of moral growth whereas an adult may still be at the childhood level of moral development. Monden also shows that a person's concept of God, law, obligation, conscience, sin, guilt, contrition and confession are entirely in keeping with the level that a person is at. It is important according to Monden that we lead people to the Adult stage, where they can accept God as Unconditional Love and Sin as a refusal to love.

### III

We next turn our attention to the four stages of cognitive development as described by Jean Piaget.

#### **Four Development Stages of Jean Piaget**

The Swiss biologist and psychologist Jean Piaget (1896-1980) constructed a highly influential model of child development and learning. His theory is based on the idea that the developing child builds cognitive structures – mental “maps”, schemes or networked concepts for understanding and responding to physical experiences within his or her environment. Piaget further explained that a child’s cognitive structures increases in sophistication with development, moving from a few innate reflexes such as crying and sucking to highly complex mental activities.

The following are the four developmental stages and the processes by which children progress through them :

##### *1. Sensorimotor stage (birth – 2 years old)*

The child through physical interaction with his or her environment, builds a set of concepts about reality and how it works. This is the stage where a child does not know that physical objects remain in existence even when out of sight.

##### *2. Preoperational stage (ages 2-7)*

The child is not yet able to conceptualize abstractly and needs concrete physical Situations.

##### *3. Concrete operations (ages 7-11)*

As physical experience accumulates, the child starts to conceptualize, creating logical structures that explain his or her physical experiences. Abstract problem solving is also possible at this stage. For example, arithmetic equations can be solved with numbers, not just with objects.

##### *4. Formal operations (beginning at ages 11-15)*

By this point, the child’s cognitive structures are like those of an adult and include conceptual reasoning.

Piaget explained that during all development stages, the child experiences his or her environment using whatever mental maps he or she has constructed so far. If the experience is a repeated one, it fits easily – or is assimilated – into the child’s cognitive structure so that he



maintains mental “equilibrium”. If the experience is different or new, the child loses equilibrium and alters his or her cognitive structure to accommodate the new conditions. This way, the child erects more and more adequate cognitive structures.<sup>9</sup>

Jean Piaget was in many ways a pioneer. His work was taken and expanded into a system of Moral Development by Lawrence Kohlberg.

### Stages of Moral Development of Lawrence Kohlberg

Lawrence Kohlberg was a professor at Harvard University. He started as a development psychologist and then moved into the field of moral education. At Harvard’s Center for Moral Education, he conducted cross-cultural research studies in the US, Mexico, Taiwan, Turkey, Yucatan and elsewhere. His theory of moral development draws on the thinking of Jean Piaget and John Dewey.

Kohlberg was able to demonstrate through studies that people progress in their moral reasoning i.e. in their bases for ethical behaviour through a series of stages. He identified six stages which could be classified into three levels :

LEVEL	STAGE	SOCIAL ORIENTATION
Pre-conventional	1	Obedience and Punishment
	2	Individualism, Instrumentalism, and Exchange

The first level of moral thinking is that generally found at the elementary school level. In the first stage of this level, people behave according to socially acceptable norms because they are told to do so by some authority figure (e.g., parent or teacher). This obedience is compelled by the threat or application of punishment. The second stage of this level is characterized by a view that right behavior means acting in one’s own best interests.

Conventional	3	“Good boy/girl”
	4	Law and Order

The second level of moral thinking is that generally found in society, hence the name “conventional.” The first stage of this level (stage 3) is characterized by an attitude which seeks to do what will gain the approval of others. The second stage is one oriented to abiding by the law and responding to the obligations of duty.

Post-conventional	5	Social Contract
	6	Principled Conscience

The third level of moral thinking is one that Kohlberg felt is not reached by the majority of adults. Its first stage (stage 5) is an understanding of social mutuality and a genuine interest in the welfare of others. The last stage (stage 6) is based on respect for universal principle and the demands of individual conscience. While Kohlberg always believed in the existence of Stage 6 and had some nominees for it, he could never get enough subjects to define it, much less observe their longitudinal movement to it.<sup>10</sup>

How does Kohlberg explain the movement from one stage to another. He says that if the child is challenged so as to perceive the contradictions in his own thinking, he will try to generate new and better solutions to moral problems. It would be necessary to introduce a sense of contradiction and inadequacy of the child's way of thinking, thus creating "cognitive disequilibrium" that would lead to an awareness of the greater adequacy of the next higher stage. But where there is no such cognitive conflict, there is no reason to look for a better solution, and therefore, no incentive to move on to the next stage.<sup>11</sup>

### Responses to Lawrence Kohlberg

Paul Philibert makes a distinction between the how of morality and the why of morality, between *developmental* structures and *existential* structures. Development means the transformation of structures of knowing into increasingly more adequate and more receptive postures of assimilation, so that knowledge and action differentiate effectively the multiplicity of experienced reality. The categories, structures and theory of developmental stages offer ways to describe and experience imaginatively the moral situation of another. Existential structures on the other hand help us put order into our understanding of life events that have the power to re-orientate our self-understanding and our actions. These significant events can help people move from one psychosocial focus to another. Philibert speaks of three kinds of events :

- a) Marker events which deal with relational events in a institutional focus (social role bonding).

10. [www.nd.edu/~rbarger/kohlberg.html](http://www.nd.edu/~rbarger/kohlberg.html)

11 Mathias G., *Moral Development and Psychological Development*, Rome, 1987, p 40

- b) Relational commitments or one to one associations
- c) Transcendent relations, the experience of God or religious experience.

According to Philibert, religious experience or conversion can express itself in a variety of ways: as the unification of a divided self, as a change in direction or as an act of surrender. In short, while acknowledging the value of Kohlberg's stages of moral growth Paul Philibert emphasizes the need of a complementarity of the developmental and existential dimensions of morality.<sup>12</sup>

Carol Gilligan dissents from Kohlberg's interpretation of postconventional morality on the basis of her conviction that a male chauvinism skews the Kohlberg stage descriptions. She demonstrates that the highly concrete and relationally focused interests of postconventional women are trivialized in Kohlberg's stage descriptions, by showing that postconventional women have been consistently scored as Stage 3 reasoners according to Kohlberg's criteria. After examining Kohlberg's postulate of a Stage 4 1/2, Murphy and Gilligan come to the conclusion that postconventional moral reasoning must be described by two sets of adult stage structures.

- (1) Postconventional formal is much the same as the standard Kohlberg descriptions.
- (2) Postconventional contextual includes transformations of moral reasoning that are founded upon relations with other persons, personal ego needs and commitment within the context of ambiguity.<sup>13</sup>

Craig Dykstra takes issue with Lawrence Kohlberg over his conception of a person. The point he makes is that people, as they strive to be moral, consistently find it impossible to think their way into goodness. In other words, reasoning power does not translate into moral power. According to Dykstra, Kohlberg's concept of man is

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12 Philibert P., *The Motors of Morality: Religion and Relation*, in Joy D., *Moral Development Foundations*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1983, p 87 ss

13 Murphy M & Gilligan C, *Moral Development in Late Adolescence and Adulthood: A Critique and Reconstruction of Kohlberg's Theory*, Human Development, 23 (1980) 77-104 as quoted in Philibert P., *The Motors of Morality: Religion and Relation*



Kantian. He describes the Kantian man as follows "Rationality is the source of human freedom and moral choice, and the development of rationality is the key to human authenticity, just community and moral maturity."<sup>14</sup>

According to Dykstra the key to an alternative view lies in the biblical notion of repentance. It is a re-orientation of the whole self which leaves nothing – one's reason, one's conscience, one's emotions, one's needs, fears and desires – unaffected. It is a *metanoia*, a turning in a new direction. How does repentance or *metanoia* come about? According to Dykstra, in a dialectical relationship between the imagination, action and education for the moral life involves the education of the imagination in the context of a community-in-action.<sup>15</sup>

### Kohlberg Responds to his Critics

Kohlberg's more recent development research discovered that "in about 20 percent of college youths, the transition from conventional to principled thought is marked by extreme relativism accompanied by an apparent retrogression to Stage 2 instrumental hedonism."<sup>16</sup> He calls this transitional phase Stage 4 ½ and characterizes it as post-conventional but not yet principled.<sup>17</sup>

On reaching Stage 6 of Kohlberg's scheme, one asks, "Why be moral?" or "Why be just in a universe that is largely unjust?". His stage 6 has no real answer.<sup>18</sup> Kohlberg has postulated a hypothetical or metaphoric "Stage 7" to suggest "some meaningful solutions" to the fundamental question of the meaning of life. Stage 7 is designed to answer some questions left unresolved by his six moral stages. It presupposes but goes beyond post-conventional justice reasoning. It is

14 Dykstra C., *What are People like? An Alternative to Kohlberg's View*, in Joy D., *Moral Developmental Foundations*, pp 155-56

15 Ibid. pp153-162

16 Kohlberg L., *The Psychology of Moral Development*, p 130 quoted in Mathias G., *Moral Development and Psychosocial Development*, p 44

17 Ibid., 411

18 Moral G., *Religious Education Development*, p 78 quoted in Mathias G., *Moral Development and Psychosocial Development*, p 45

essentially a stage of religious orientation, and takes the form of an ethic of agape or an ethic of natural law justice.<sup>19</sup>

Responding to Carol Gilligan, who accuses Kohlberg of a male sexual bias, Kohlberg acknowledges Gilligan's contribution toward enlarging his narrow moral domain, but does not agree with her that there are two separate general moralities, one morality of justice and another completely separate or opposed morality of care or worse still, one for men and another for women. Kohlberg says "Gilligan's distinction between a morality of care and a morality of justice is a distinction held in the minds of all human beings, be they male or female.....In our view, however, these two senses of the word moral do not represent two different moral orientations existing at the same level of generality and validity. We see justice as both rational and implying an attitude of empathy."<sup>20</sup>

We have seen Jean Piaget's 4 stages of cognitive development and how Lawrence Kohlberg uses this scheme to develop his own 6 stages of Moral Development. We have also taken a look at how Paul Philibert, Craig Dykstra and Carol Gilligan have taken objection to certain aspects of this scheme. We ended this section with Kohlberg responding to some of his critics.

### **Erik Erikson's Stages of Psycho-social Development**

We now turn to another famous psychologist, Erik Erikson, a disciple of Freud who has elaborated 8 stages of Psycho-social Development in the Human Life Cycle.

The key to understanding Erikson's 8 stages of the Human Life Cycle is the epigenetic principle, which Erikson borrows from the science of embryology. This is how Erikson describes the epigenetic principle: "anything that grows has a ground plan and out of this ground plan, the parts arise, each part having its time of special ascendancy, until all parts have arisen to form a functioning whole."<sup>21</sup>

19 Mathias G., *Moral Development and Psychosocial Development* p. 47

20 Kohlberg L., *The Psychology of Moral Development*, p 232 quoted in Mathias G., *Moral Development and Psychosocial Development* p 53

21 Erikson E., *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, Faber & Faber, London, 1983, p 92 quoted in Mathias G., *Moral Development and Psychosocial Development*, p 60

Let us look at Erikson's eight stages of human development :

**Stage 1: Infancy (Oral-Sensory)** Age: Birth to 12-18 months Virtue: **Hope**

Crisis: Trust v/s Mistrust Important Event: Feeding

Description: In the first year of life, infants depend on others for food, warmth, and affection and therefore must be able to blindly trust the parents or caregivers for providing these.

Positive outcome: If their needs are met consistently and responsively by the parents, infants not only will develop a secure attachment with the parents, but will learn to trust their environment in general as well.

Negative outcome: If not, the infant will develop mistrust towards people and things in their environment, even towards themselves.

**Stage 2: Toddler (Muscular-Anal)** Age: 18 months to 3 yrs. Virtue : **Will**

Crisis: Autonomy (Independence) v/s Doubt (Shame) Imp. Event: Toilet Training

Description: Toddlers learn to walk, talk, use-control and self-confidence begin to develop at this stage.

Positive outcome: If parents encourage their child's use of initiative and reassure her when she makes mistakes, the child will develop the confidence needed to cope with future situations that require choice, control and independence.

Negative outcome: If parents are overprotective, or disapprove of the child's acts of independence, she may begin to feel ashamed of her behaviour, or have too much doubt of her abilities.

**Stage 3: Early Childhood (Locomotor)** Age: 3- 6 yrs Virtue : **Purpose**

Crisis: Initiative v/s Guilt Important Event: Independence

Description: Children have newfound power at this stage as they have developed motor skills and become more and more engaged in social interaction with people around them. They now must learn to achieve a balance between eagerness for more adventure and more responsibility, and learning to control impulses and childish fantasies.

Positive outcome: If parents are encouraging, but consistent in discipline, children will learn to accept without guilt, that certain things are not allowed, but at the same time will not feel shame when using their imagination and engaging in make-believe role plays.

Negative outcome: If not, children may develop a sense of guilt and may come to believe that it is wrong to be independent.



**Stage 4 :Elementary & Middle School Years** Age : 6 to 12 years Virtue : Competence

Crisis: Competence (industry) v/s Inferiority Important Event : School

Description: School is the important event at this stage. Children learn to make things, use tools, and acquire the skills to be a worker and a potential provider. And they do all these while making the transition from the world of home into the world of peers.

Positive outcome : If children can discover pleasure in intellectual stimulation, being productive, seeking success, they will develop a sense of competence.

Negative outcome: If not, they will develop a sense of inferiority.

**Stage 5 : Adolescence** Age : 12 to 18 years Virtue : Fidelity

Crisis: Identity v/s Role Confusion Important event: Peer Relationships

Description : This is the time when we ask the question “Who am I?” To successfully answer the question, Erikson suggests, the adolescent must integrate the healthy resolution of all earlier conflicts. Did we develop the basic sense of trust ? Do we have a strong sense of independence, competence and feel in control of our lives? Adolescents who have successfully dealt with earlier conflicts are ready for the “Identity Crisis”, which is considered by Erikson as the single most significant conflict a person must face.

Positive outcome: If the adolescent solves this conflict successfully, s/he will come out of this stage with a strong identity and ready to plan for the future.

Negative outcome: If not, the adolescent will sink into confusion, unable to make decisions and choices, especially about vocation, sexual orientation and his role in life in general.

**Stage 6 : Young Adulthood** Age : 19 to 40 years Virtue : Love

Crisis : Intimacy v/s Isolation Important Event : Love relationships

Description: In this stage, the most important events are love relationships. No matter how successful you are with your work, said Erikson, you are not developmentally complete until you are capable of intimacy. An individual who has not committed relationship may retreat into isolation.

Positive outcome : Adult individuals can form close relationships and share with others if they have achieved a sense of identity.

Negative outcome : If not, they will fear commitment, feel isolated and unable to depend on anybody in the world.

**Stage 7 : Middle Adulthood**    Age : 40 to 65 years    Virtue : **Care**

Crisis : Generativity v/s Stagnation    Important Event: Parenting

Description : By “generativity” Erikson refers to the adult’s ability to look outside oneself and care for others, through parenting, for instance. Erikson suggested that adults need children as much as children need adults and this stage reflects the need to create a living legacy.

Positive outcome : People can solve this crisis by having and nurturing children or helping the next generation in other ways.

Negative outcome : If this crisis does not successfully resolve, the person will remain self-centered and experience stagnation later in life.

**Stage 8 : Late Adulthood**    Age : 65 to death    Virtue : **Wisdom**

Crisis : Integrity v/s Despair    Important Event: Accepting one’s life

Description : Old age is a time for reflecting upon one’s own life and its role in the big scheme of things and seeing it filled with pleasure and satisfaction or disappointments and failures.

Positive outcome : If the adult has achieved a sense of fulfillment about life and a sense of unity within himself and with others, he will accept death with a sense of integrity. Just as the healthy child will not fear life, said Erikson, the healthy adult will not fear death.

Negative outcome : If not, the individual will despair and fear death.<sup>22</sup>

Erikson speaks of development in terms of a basic threefold division: “I will speak of moral learning as an aspect of childhood; of ideological experimentation as a part of adolescence; and of ethical consolidation as an adult task.”<sup>23</sup> Erikson uses moral in the narrow moralistic sense viz. internalizing the prohibitions of those significant to him. He makes a distinction between the moral orientation of childhood, which is more primitive and superego dominated and the mature ethical orientation of the adult, with a universal sense of values assented to with insight and foresight, in anticipation of immediate responsibilities.<sup>24</sup>

22 These eight stages are taken with a few additions from the following site: <http://psychology.about.com/library/weekly/aa091500b.htm>

23 Erikson E., *Reflection on the Dissent of Contemporary Youth*, International Journal of Psycho-Analysis, 51 (1970) 11-20, quoted in Conn W., *Conscience: Development and Self-Transcendence* p 76

24 Erikson E., *Dissent of Contemporary Youth*, p. 16 quoted in Conn W.,

Erikson's eight stages of the Human Life Cycle is broad-based and comprehensive. It deals not only with the individual but also with the individual's interaction with others in the community. It is concerned not only with a person's moral development but also his/her psychosocial development. Moreover whether he is speaking about the hope of infancy, the fidelity of adolescence or the love, care and wisdom of adulthood, it is clear that Erikson is telling us that one becomes one's truly and fully human self only insofar as, and to the extent that one reaches out beyond oneself to others.

#### IV. Walter Conn

In his book "Conscience: Development and Self-Transcendence", Walter Conn makes three important points: 1) What is Conscience? 2) Authenticity and Responsibility. 3) Conscience and Self Transcendence

##### *1) What is Conscience?*

Following Bernard Lonergan, Conn identifies conscience with moral consciousness. He rejects the various attempts that have been made to equate conscience with some particular faculty or power or act of the person. What is presented to consciousness is not a collection of faculties or powers but a set of interrelated operations.

"To know the real, one has to reach the truth. To reach the truth one has to understand, to grasp the intelligible. To grasp the intelligible, one has to attend to the data. Each successive level of operations complements its predecessors. The topmost level is the level of deliberate control and self-control. There consciousness becomes conscience: there operations are authentic in the measure that they are responses to value."<sup>25</sup>

Conn refers to other authors who also feel that Conscience must be linked to the person.

Eric Mount suggests that the understanding of the meaning "person" is inseparable from the meaning of "conscience". He says further, "man does not *have* a conscience; he *is* a conscience."<sup>26</sup> In the same way

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*Conscience: Development and Self-Transcendence*, 77-78

25 Lonergan, *Faith and Beliefs* p 4, quoted in CONN W., *Conscience: Development and Self-Transcendence*, pp 204-5

26 MOUNT E., *Conscience and Responsibility*. John Knox Press, Richmond VA, 1969, 60 34



Helmut Thielicke argues that "differences in the understanding of conscience clearly arise out of differences of the understanding of the human. My view of conscience is determined by my understanding of what is the normative factor determining human existence."<sup>27</sup> Gerhard Ebeling explains why it is proper to speak of the human in terms of conscience. He says "the human is a matter of conscience in two senses: he is ultimately conscience, and he ultimately concerns the conscience."<sup>28</sup>

## 2) *Authenticity and Responsibility.*

The second concept that Conn develops is Responsibility. He points out that the last century has seen the emergence of authenticity as the dominant category in moral reflection. Even though authenticity is more demanding than the ideal of sincerity it is not entirely unambiguous and may on occasion give rise to violence and unreason. Authenticity is not a criterion of the moral life, as it is often claimed to be, but rather an ideal which stands in need of a criterion.

For Walter Conn the idea of "responsibility" may in part fill the need of this criterion. Responsibility symbolizes the discovery that one can only be true to one's self insofar as one is true to others — that insofar as one responds to the values in each human situation in a manner that is at once free and creative, critical and fitting. If the responsible person responds to value, then, his or her authenticity is not arbitrary but self-transcending. The author further explains that true self-realization is not only unopposed to responsible love of others, but, far from conflicting with such a love, requires it as a fundamental condition for its own possibility. Authentic self-realization is found only in genuine self-transcendence.<sup>29</sup>

In developing the idea of responsibility, Conn draws on the thinking of Richard Niebuhr's *The Responsible Self*<sup>30</sup>. According to Niebuhr, "What is implicit in the idea of responsibility is the image of man-the-

27 Thielicke H., *Theological Ethics*, tr William Lazareth, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1966, 1:298, quoted in Mount, *Conscience and Responsibility*, p. 23

28 Ebeling G., *Word and Faith*, tr James Leith, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1963, quoted in Ibid. p 412

29 Conn W., *Conscience: Development and Self-Transcendence*, pp ix-x

30 Niebuhr R., *The Responsible Self*, NY, Harper & Row, 1963

answerer, man engaged in dialogue, man acting in response to action upon him.”<sup>31</sup> Niebuhr specifies four elements to give a systematic definition to the symbol of responsibility. These four elements are response, interpretation, authenticity and social solidarity. The last of these elements receives a lot of attention from Niebuhr. To be a self is possible only as one takes upon oneself the perspective of other selves. Besides these four elements Conn feels the need of adding one more element, viz. the demand which we all experience in our innermost selves to respond in every instance in a way fully consistent with our best judgment in a situation. This imperative according to Conn is the root of moral consciousness, the possibility of ethics and the very core of the notion of responsibility.<sup>32</sup>

### 3) *Conscience and Self-Transcendence*

Next, Conn turns his attention to Conscience and Self-Transcendence. Building on Lonergan’s Transcendental Method, he points out that “Conscience is the dynamic thrust toward self-transcendence at the core of a person’s very subjectivity revealing itself at the level of moral consciousness as a demand for responsible decision in accord with reasonable judgment.”<sup>33</sup> Conscience is not some given constant of the human person. Rather human subjects are empirically, intelligently, rationally and morally conscious, and that consciousness takes endlessly multiple, variant form in the concrete, each more or less authentic. It is not enough for a person to say that he has followed his conscience, he has also the obligation to authentically form it. Finally Conn observes that conscience is not just moral consciousness but moral consciousness which has transformed itself by shifting the criterion of its decisions and choices from satisfactions to values, a person who is a source of love, a principle of benevolence because his or her being is a being-in-love.<sup>34</sup>

### Concluding Remarks

- a. 1. For a long time in teaching Fundamental Moral Theology I was satisfied with the scholastic definition of conscience with the two-fold distinction of conscience as a faculty and as an act of judgment. Then followed the clear-cut divisions: right and

31 Ibid. p 54

32 Conn W., *Conscience: Development and Self-Transcendence*, p 25

33 Ibid., p 205, 34. Ibid., p 207

erroneous, vincibly erroneous and invincibly erroneous, doubtful and certain, etc. It made for clear thinking but somehow it left one with a feeling of emptiness. By linking conscience with moral consciousness, Lonergan offers a better alternative. For him moral consciousness implies experiencing, understanding, judging and deciding. Conscience, finally is the person deciding between right and wrong.

- b. 2. All of us are aware that conscience is the ultimate subjective norm of morality and we are also aware that quite often conscience can be erroneous or can be led astray. We can also develop an easy conscience, one that is not self-critical. To counter this danger of subjectivity, Conn borrowing on Richard Niebuhr proposes an objective pole of responsibility, which comprises response, interpretation, authenticity and social solidarity. The last characteristic of social solidarity is one that we have to take very seriously. For a long time, Moral Theology has been accused of being exclusively individualistic. While we are conscious of the social dimension of morality and of social sin, these categories are still to enter the moral consciousness and the lives of our people. Here in India, when the gap between the few rich and the poverty of the masses grows wider day by day, our social responsibility would imply empowering the poor and emphasizing the social obligations of those blessed with wealth.
- c. 3. The ideas of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg have been around for a long time. Kohlberg's cross-cultural studies have indicated the lines along which individuals grow. He has given us the how of morality but not the why. Being a rationalist and a humanist, for him, religious motivation plays a very insignificant role in a person's moral development. Later he made allowance for a hypothetical or metaphorical 7<sup>th</sup> Stage. We need to look more closely at what makes people move from one stage to another. It has often struck me that those who attend a life in the spirit seminar, or spend a week at the Divine Retreat Centre at Muringoor, show high motivation, and a great eagerness to make a change and a breakthrough in their lives. May be as Fr. Bernard Haring often used to insist in his classes at the Alphonsianum, morality and spirituality are inseparable.
- d. 4. In the light of Piaget's theory of Cognitive Development and Lawrence Kohlberg's cross cultural studies on Moral Development

it is clear that for children at the preconventional stage, their sense of right or wrong depends for the most part on what they have learned from their parents or the significant other in their lives. At this stage “good” is what is approved of by their parents and “bad” is what is disapproved of. Again young children internalize the prohibitions and injunctions of their parents. We have also seen earlier how at this stage the SuperEgo and Conscience are indistinguishable. Now the Church insists that children need to receive the sacrament of reconciliation before they can receive the Eucharist. There are also good reasons for this insistence. I am of the view that the first encounter of the priest with the young child in the sacrament of reconciliation could take the form of a friendly chat, where the priest asks a few questions to put the child at ease rather than insist on an elaborate examination of conscience based on the ten commandments.

5. The scholastics defined Conscience as a practical judgment about the goodness or badness of an action urging us to do what is good and avoid what is evil. This definition does make for clarity and distinguishes the practical judgment from Conscience as a faculty. However it is too static a concept. Walter Conn, on the other hand defines conscience as “the dynamic thrust toward self-transcendence at the core of a person’s very subjectivity revealing itself at the level of moral consciousness as a demand for responsible decision in accord with reasonable judgment.” In this way Conn replaces the static notion of conscience with a dynamic one and links conscience with the idea of self-transcendence and the demand for responsible decision.
6. Fr. Felix Podimattam, has an article called *Summary Blueprint of a Christian with a Fully Formed Conscience*. As the title indicates it points to the ideal towards which every Christian ought to strive. One of the main points made by the article is that holiness is wholeness, a person with a fully formed conscience is happy, joyful person who radiates happiness wherever the person goes.



# Conscience and Relational Humanum

S. Arokiasamy

Dr. S. Arokiasamy S.J., Professor of Moral Theology at Vidya Jyoti, Delhi and President of the Association of Moral Theologians of India, discusses the all-important topic: *Conscience and Relational Humanum*. While appreciating the shift in the understanding of Conscience from impersonal to personal and acknowledging the significant gains from Developmental Psychologies to the traditional understanding of Conscience, he emphasizes the relational nature of the human person which is central to the understanding of Conscience and points out its importance and impacts. It has to be emphasized once and for all that we are relational beings and that whatever is personal is social.

In a world of rapid change of cultural attitudes and post-modernist mindset which questions traditional moral beliefs and axioms on unchanging values and imperatives flowing from them, an adequate understanding of conscience is urgent and important.

Conscience is at the heart of moral behaviour and the personal locus of moral decisions and choices. Traditionally moral theology considered conscience of the individual subject. The growth and formation of conscience were focused again on the individual subject. The language used for conscience was impersonal. Traditionally we refer to conscience as 'it'. If we want to understand the growth and formation of conscience, we have to bring it to the heart of the human subject as person. Indeed the pre-eminently preferred biblical expression for conscience is 'heart'. Heart is supremely personal. According to the Second Vatican Council conscience is the sacred core and sanctuary of the human person (cf. GS 16). It means that the fundamental nature of conscience is personal. Since conscience is the heart of the human person, then the growth and formation of conscience correlates with the growth of the person as a mature human being. We appreciate the shift in the understanding of

conscience from an impersonal approach to personalist understanding. But the traditional approach to conscience was also focused on the individual human subject and acts of the individual conscience.

It is true our understanding of conscience has grown through the help of developmental psychology in relation to growth in moral maturity. For example, depth psychology has highlighted the false conscience of super-ego. In contrast to it we have understood the right, healthy growth of true personal and adult conscience. This helps tremendously the way we understand education into formation of conscience. While we acknowledge all these gains, we miss still something very significant in the traditional understanding of conscience. It is the relational humanum of which conscience is central. I would say that advertence to the relational nature of human person and therefore of conscience was not entirely absent but it was haphazard and never systematic. Mostly it was referred to in matters dealing with social questions. Without making a travesty of the tradition, we seem to think that there are two parallel moralities, namely personal and social. We hardly emphasised that human persons are relational beings and that whatever is personal is social. If so, human relationality embraces social. Hence I would like first to briefly highlight the relational nature of human person and then point out its implications for the relational nature of conscience and its impact on decisions of conscience. This is the main purpose of this brief reflection.

### **Rational Subjectivity of the Human is Inadequate**

In the present scenario of globalisation, individualism, consumerism and competition are the dominant factors with focus on the individual rational subject. Such an approach is antithetical to inter-relatedness between human beings, between human beings and nature, interdependence between persons and communities, cooperation, solidarity. Whatever be the negative impact of globalisation, in a globalising and globalised world, people and countries are coming closer together in trade, commerce and business relations. Though coming together is largely commercial, it is disturbing and frustrating that this coming together does not contribute to building bridges between peoples keeping open and communication of inter human and intercommunity outreach. In the contemporary scenario, what is dominant is rational subjectivity of the individual. In the framework of the Western enlightenment, reason, rationality and the individual become the interlocutors of Western secular

culture. One of the important tasks of moral theology is to rethink the specific rational nature as the immediate foundation of morality and make our understanding of the human more adequate by integrating the relational nature of the human and build a relational anthropology. Understanding the human as relational humanum points to the way we can respond to the challenges, patterns and structures of exclusion and move towards a world civilised and humanised through the discovery of interconnectedness, interrelatedness and interdependence of everything and everyone and above all by solidarity of and between peoples. It will also emphasise that all our moral choices either as individual or as a community will be relational choices. In this approach we would not distinguish between personal conscience and social conscience. I understand that that relational perspective of our humanity will help us to respond to the challenges of marginalisation, oppression, exclusion and work towards a human solidarity of interconnected, interrelated and interdependent humanity and promote a praxis of inclusion. We also realise that relational humanum should be understood historically. Historicity means that we recognise the historical wounds of divisions and alienations of relational humanum and strive to overcome them

The traditional approach of considering the specific rational nature of the human being as the immediate foundation of morality and moral law is not adequate. It needs rethinking. The moral tradition focused on what is 'distinctively human' verging on separation and isolation of the human missed our being with others. Should not our being 'distinctive' be a source to discover our being connected and our relational existence? We do not reject rational subjectivity of the human because specific nature of human beings is rational, but we reject the narrowing of the rational subjectivity of the human to isolated individuals with amnesia to the inner relational dimension. The tradition is comfortable with human beings as individuals and being islands. Individuals are not monads. Relation to one another and other beings of the cosmos is a second level choice, not intrinsic to being human. Hence the question is how to make our understanding of the human more adequate. It means expanding our understanding of rational subjectivity of the human by explicating what is implicit and showing the rational subjectivity as being incomplete regarding the total humanum. In modern times, reimagining rational nature of the human as personal nature aims at the recovery of the relational humanum. Human person is rational, relational, egalitarian and responsible.



## Reaffirmation of the Relational Nature of the Human Subject

Historically, understanding of moral law and moral imperatives was narrowly focused on rational nature of individual human subject without adverting to the intersubjectivity, in which the human subject is constituted besides the broader sweep of relations in which human beings live, move and have their being. We can say that the human situation is a relational situation. In the history of morals we notice that the relational perspectives of the rational nature of human beings were either ignored or were taken for granted without reckoning with their consequences for moral life. In the Catholic tradition of morality the way human rights were understood is an indication of the individualism of rational subjectivity of human being, which is also a tradition of the Enlightenment. Such a tradition had not much to say on the great human issues affecting peoples such as colonialism by Christian countries of the West of countries of Africa, South America and Asia and slave trade strangely in the so-called period of enlightenment in modern times. The last two World Wars, the liquidation of six million Jews by Nazis took place in countries predominantly Christian. These events and the continuing conflicts, thereafter, the countless small wars in different parts of the world in the name of religion, culture, ethnicity, caste leading to destruction of peoples, cultures and communities besides the deprivation, marginalisation, displacement and exclusion inflicted by elitist and one-sided models of development are further evidence of the individualism of the rational subjectivity to the detriment of interhuman relationality and solidarity of people. Today the value of interhuman solidarity gained importance in the social teaching of the Church. Pope John Paul II has brought this value into prominence (cf. M. Amaladoss, "Solidarity and Struggle" in *VJTR*, 68 (2002) pp. 653-664). Interhuman solidarity is an essential perspective of all morality, not only in the area of social morality.

We also know that traditional focus on the subjectivity of the individual led to an ethics of autonomy. It did not go beyond the individual identity. Strong individualism, as mentioned above marked the approach of ethics to moral virtues, behavior and human rights, centred on the rights of the individual person (cf. Marciano Vidal, "Is Morality Based on Autonomy Compatible with the Ethics of Liberation?" *Concilium*, 1984, pp. 80-86; Dieter Mieth, "Autonomy or Liberation: Two Paradigms of Christian Ethics" *Concilium*, 1984, pp. 87-93). Relational humanum

did not enter the ethical reflection in a fundamental sense (cf. Arokiasamy, "Human Relatedness and Moral Decision Making", *Jeevadhara*, 25(1995) pp.396-400).

In a relational perspective, we consider the communitarian and societal aspects of morality and therefore to think morally means that we think, act and live relationally. Our decisions in conscience are relational. They embody in some way our relational humanum. Relationality will enter our moral vision and shape our acts in a normative way. Hence if we reckon with relational nature of the human, then we need to rethink all areas of morality, in particular the way we understand conscience, its judgements and decisions we make according to and in conscience.. All this implies that we need to develop a relational anthropology.

### **To Be Human is to Be Relational (Relational Anthropology)**

In the renewal of moral theology, development and rethinking of the foundation of moral law in the perspective of relational anthropology is a great challenge and an urgent task. We can state that the concept of human person which integrates relational and communitarian perspectives in the understanding of the rational nature of human being is of fundamental significance for morality.

### **Relationality Constitutive of Personhood**

Relationality belongs to the nature of human person and it belongs to the truth of the person. In the light of this truth, human dignity that affirms that every human person has an intrinsic worth is relational dignity. It has to be actualised historically in relationships. That human persons are ends in themselves and never a means to someone else or something includes this relational character because relationality belongs to the nature of human person. To be human is to be interhuman, to be related. Humanity in its wholeness means also to be co-human. To be human is to be co-human. To be human is to be with. To live morally and act morally is eminently relational. To act in conscience and according to conscience will include the truth of the relational nature of human person.

We are reminded in the creation account of the co-humanity of man and woman (cf. the first three chapters of Genesis). Human dignity, human vocation and its fulfilment need to be understood in relational terms in a fundamental sense. If on the contrary we discount relational humanum, and deny our intrinsic connection to each other, we end up

affirming that our primary right is to be left alone. If so, we reject the virtues of caring and sharing with those who are excluded and marginalised. It means that compassion and solidarity with the powerless and the afflicted will cease to be virtues and obligations of our relational humanum. Decisions of conscience devoid of relational character will then reinforce individualism of moral life. Hence without relational perspective, the heart of human person (conscience) will be the centre of individualism deprived of the resources and energy of love which build relationships and solidarity. The very term *con-* (*cum*) *scientia* connotes relationality.

### **Human Relationality not an Afterthought and Mere Circumstance**

We recognise that the subjectivity of the individual human person cannot be understood without intersubjectivity as mentioned earlier. The latter is constitutive of the subjectivity of every human person. Hence it is also constitutive of heart of our being, namely conscience. Intersubjectivity and interhuman relationality belong to the objective reality of human person. It means it belongs to the objective moral order of human person. Theology of creation supposes such a relational anthropology. God did not create human beings as individuals, but humankind as men and women in His own image and likeness. It is creation of human person in community (Gen. 1:26-27). God who created us in relationship and community wants us to be saved not as individuals but as a people (cf. LG 9). We could say that God created humankind in relationship and for relationship, and in community and for community. Relational humanum means that human person in community is basic to being human. That is why we can affirm that to be human is to be interhuman, to be related. Hence anthropology in its basic sense is relational anthropology. If the foundation of morality is relational humanum, then relationality enters into all aspects of morality, moral decisions, moral commitments, its principles, virtues, agency, particular imperatives and transcendental value perspectives and internationality and the way we understand conscience. Relational anthropology makes morality relational and is essential to moral wholeness. Relationality makes all our judgements and decisions of conscience relational. In all our deliberations, judgements and choices of conscience, we live our fundamental human relationality. In all unethical choices, we can presume that there is a betrayal of the relational wholeness of the human.



Rediscovery of relational humanum is the liberation of the human. We can speak of redemption of the rational nature of the human from narrow and one-sided anthropology through relationality. This would also be liberation of conscience from individualism.

### **Knowledge, Freedom and Conscience in Relational Perspective**

We shall consider the two characteristics of the rational nature, namely reason (knowledge) and freedom in relational perspective and their implications for the growth and formation of conscience. In moral evaluation of human acts and behaviour and decisions of conscience, we consider the engagement of knowledge and freedom. But in traditional act-centred morality, we did not consider their relational contours and resonances reflecting the relational nature of human person. Human reason constituted in knowledge and freedom is relational in a fundamental sense. If we recognise their relational nature, we also realise the tremendous consequences it has for all dimensions and areas of morality and the way we understand conscience.

Growth in knowledge (enlightening and liberating knowledge) and in freedom makes persons grow to personal maturity. The same growth towards an adult and personal maturity correlates with the growth of an adult and mature conscience. Both go together. The more we grown in relational maturity, the better will be the nature and function our moral decisions and behaviour of conscience.

First a word on our growth in knowledge in relational perspective. Human knowledge in its rational character cannot be narrowly confined to individual subjectivity. Both the act of knowledge and the knowledge that we acquire share in the relational character of our being. Without this perspective knowledge cannot be adequately and holistically human and therefore adequately moral. Formation of conscience grows through knowledge marked by relationality.

Freedom is the second characteristic of rational nature of human person. It is basically capacity for self-determination and secondarily exercised in freedom of choice. Since rational is relational, it shares in the relational nature of human beings. We can say human freedom is relational freedom. Freedom to be oneself is to be relational and to be related. It is actualised in relationships. All decisions of conscience made in knowledge and in freedom are expressions of our relational humanum.

In the moral traditional conscience is considered under three aspects, namely, awareness of the basic moral principles called “synderesis”, practical reasoning which means moving from principles to conclusions and “conscience” meaning concluding judgement and act (cf. Robert J. Smith, *Conscience and Catholicism*, New York, 1998, p.57). These three aspects of conscience share in the relational nature of human person.

### **Conscience and Responsibility in the Perspective of Relational Humanum**

Moral decisions as decisions of conscience go with responsibility. Responsibility is a fundamental category of morality. Response-ability which makes for human responsibility will also enter the way conscience functions. If being human means to be related, to be human means also to be responsible. We can say that to act morally is to act responsibly. We can also say that all judgements and decisions of conscience are responsible ones. It means that we own our judgements and decisions and are ready to accept and stay with consequences of our choices. We are also open to growth through enlightenment and correct or modify our decisions when necessary. Such an exercise of responsibility is also relational. If Cain’s question:” Am I my brother’s keeper?” is abdication of responsibility, it is abdication of our relational humanum. Our relational humanum structures our deliberations, judgments and decisions of conscience. Formation of conscience must attend to this. Moral Accountability for our moral choices makes an eminent sense only in relational perspective.

In this connection, we may point out that all personality cult and hero worship are antithetical to the relational nature of human responsibility, and often becomes distorted politics of power and privilege with non-accountability. So too hierarchical order of caste and gender hierarchy makes human responsibility one-sided leading to domination and exploitation. In a caste-ridden society, in formation of conscience we must reckon with this liability and work for a liberating education and freedom from caste mindset towards consciousness of equality of human dignity and egalitarian relationality of humans.

One area in which relational humanum comes into full force is the experience of forgiveness and reconciliation. It concerns restoring broken relationships. It calls for mutual responsibility for restoring the rupture

in relationships on the part of the offended and the offender. Forgiveness and reconciliation spring from the heart of human person and rooted in the vocation of our relational humanum. They are deeply relational. Hence for growth and formation of conscience, we must attend to the growth in relational maturity of persons. The latter is the spring and resource of compassion, forgiveness and solidarity.

### **Respect for Conscience in Relational Perspective**

In Catholic moral tradition, we affirm respect for the primacy of immediate conscience. The integrity and primacy of conscience must be respected even if it goes against the authority of the Church. Or as St Thomas Aquinas would say (in the **Sentences**) that it would be better to die even as excommunicated than violate the summons of immediate conscience. As Cardinal Newman said once famously: “Certainly if I am obliged to bring religion into after-dinner toasts (which does not seem quite the thing) I shall drink – to the Pope, if you please, -still, to conscience first, and to the Pope afterwards”(Quoted in What’s Conscience For ? by Robert Hodge, Maynooth, 1995, p.230- Newman in his Letter to the Duke of Norfolk; cf. also J. Ratzinger who also wrote about obedience to (immediate) conscience even against the authority of the Church). In all this, the reference is to the judgments and decisions of immediate personal conscience and they bear the stamp of human relationality within them. In the on-going life of moral commitments and choices, we recognise that moral judgments and decisions of conscience can be corrected or modified in future because of more adequate and expanded understanding of relational character of all reality and of humanity. It also means “Conscience is not primarily a matter of following norms and rules, but a personal encounter with the living God in our hearts and a determination arising out of that to act in love and solidarity with others. It means taking responsibility for oneself and others to advance human wellbeing.” (Bruce Duncan C.Ss.R-Catholic Resources. Org). This also makes clear that in the Church we need not so much debate as dialogue when people have problems of conscience and even dissent. That we are committed to a culture of dialogue flowing from our relational humanum helps us to sort out things in a relational exercise of dialogue. Culture of dialogue is necessary for the promotion of the relational dignity of human persons and communities in Church and society.



## Pointers of Relational Humanity to Contemporary Questions

Today concerning ethics and morality of the contemporary questions of human cloning, euthanasia, same sex unions and others, we need to build arguments based on our relational humanum. In these questions what is at stake is our relational humanity, its dignity, vocation and task.

In human cloning, we need to ask ourselves about the depth and extent of human relationality and our obligations to respond to them. Decision to go ahead with human cloning as a biological and scientific possibility calls for an ethical reckoning and evaluation in terms of human relationality that shapes our being human and interhuman, which informs our being a community and our ethical conduct. We can say because we do not recognise our relatedness to one another as fellow human beings, we continue and perpetuate selfish ways of exploitation devoid of solidarity including relations between countries.

In the case of human cloning, one who wants an offspring of his own flesh through cloning has to reckon with our relational humanum. And the way humankind has grown and built family community and contributed to human community is something of fundamental civilisational importance. Cloning an offspring of one's own flesh is an exercise of autism and not a relational act which recognises the presence of the other. Human biology of reproduction is not mere mammalian animal biology but human biology and human reproduction. Hence it is relational. We know that the very conception of human beings is the fruit of conjugal relationship between man and woman in marriage. All this is negated in human cloning. To ignore this is to place ourselves on a slippery slope.

An unjust and inequitable social order is an expression of the denial of interhuman solidarity. The great questions of global justice, removal of poverty and fight against disease, etc demand an approach of solidarity flowing from our relational humanum. Ignoring of our common relational humanum and refusal to allow it to shape our moral individual and collective moral decisions would amount to acquiesce in the still unjust world order. Such an approach would also easily acquiesce to the liberal views of human cloning, easy euthanasia and uncritical approval of same sex union taking the place of marriage. My point here is that human relationality must adequately enter into the ethical and

moral evaluation of such questions we are faced with. I understand that moral argument based on relationality needs further elaboration but human relationality has something normative about the morality of such issues as human cloning, etc. Ignoring would be disastrous for our common relational humanum.

Similarly, ethical argumentation and practical moral reasoning need to be built up for the ethical and moral evaluation of euthanasia and why it falls short of our relational humanity which is the source of our ethics of care, compassion and solidarity. So too we need to build solid moral argument in the ethical evaluation of same sex union. These are some areas of application of human relationality in terms of which we are called to make decisions of conscience. The task is challenging, important and urgent. We need a consistent ethic that considers human relationality in a fundamental and dynamic way in the area of moral behaviour, attitudes and virtues. In moral theology, Biblical faith and its resources need to be tapped for a deeper understanding of human relationality both for normative ethics and morality. Moral decisions and behaviour as judgements and acts of conscience will always carry within them relational contours and resonances. In the most secret core and sanctuary that conscience is, we need to listen to the summons of our relational humanum created in the image and likeness of God and respond to it. It redounds to our dignity and fulfills our vocation to communion and solidarity.

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# Autonomy of Conscience: Dialectics Between the Subjective and Objective Poles

Mathew Illathuparampil

Among the many debated moral questions *Autonomy of Conscience* assumes primacy in terms of significance as well as diversity of positions it invites. From a theological point of view this autonomy is usually understood as the self-rule or Freedom of Conscience. Autonomy of Conscience is unassailable. It is in dialectical relation to Truth. The point here to be noted is that the extent of the autonomy of conscience is a topic that requires further sustained theological considerations in view of truth and authority. The author is Dr. Mathew Illathuparampil who teaches Moral Theology at St. Joseph's Pontifical Institute, Aluva.

Alphons Liguori's *Theologia Moralis* is structured around three sections: on conscience, law and theological virtues. Suggesting the significance of conscience in the whole of moral life, in its introduction Liguori wrote that the doctrine on conscience enabled us to enter into moral reflection.<sup>1</sup> For without reference to conscience, there is no scope for subjective morality. Conscience represents and realizes the subjective aspect of morality.

Placing the subject's interiority (intentionality or conscience) to the heart of morality was not a radically new approach; it was typical of the New Testament morality. Jesus vehemently opposed the externalization of morality expressed in the Pharisaic insistence on the rigorous fulfilment of the given laws. The Jews followed the laws because they were given as laws. Such an approach, in Jesus' vision, seriously lacked its subjective character—namely, the willful appropriation of the objective norms of morality. So Jesus' attack against the Pharisaic morality cannot be

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1 Alphons Liguori, *Theologia Moralis*, Vol. I, ed. P.L. Gaudé (Roma, 1905).

reduced to a fight against excessive legalism. His was an attempt to duly place the subjects' intentionality—one's own willful ascent or dissent to objective moral norms—into the moral domain.<sup>2</sup>

Despite its singular significance in morality warranted by contemporary theology, the complexity of the issues and the extent of the diversity even in the teachings of the church on conscience indicate that theological perception on conscience is still in a process of development.<sup>3</sup> No wonder, as a living tradition, the church admits plurality of positions and allow them to be questioned by more adequate theological voices. Among the many debated questions regarding conscience, autonomy of conscience assumes primacy in terms of significance as well as the diversity of positions it invites. Given this broad context, this article means to propose a tenable approach to the autonomy of conscience by integrating contemporary ethical sources with classical moral theological wisdom.

### Understanding Conscience

In order to posit an adequate conception of the autonomy of conscience, one has to state how one understands conscience. For the perception of autonomy depends largely on how one understands conscience.

Various conceptions of conscience are on vogue. For example, Thomas does not project conscience as a faculty but as an act of judgment which draws upon various sources. As many other scholastics did, Thomas, while speaking about conscience, held a significant distinction between *synterçsis* and *conscientia*.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, *synterçsis* represents the fundamental rational principles of moral actions which are inborn in human beings and described as natural law. For Thomas *synterçsis* is the most profound innate disposition of practical intelligence to good; whereas *conscientia* is the scrutinizing or regulating conscience.

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- 2 Conscience cannot be reduced to its functions in subjective ethical deliberations alone. Objectively, conscience has been hailed as the seat of human dignity.
  - 3 Diverse theological emphases on and approaches to conscience in the teachings of the church are visible, if we make a comparative study of GS 16, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (nos. 1776-1802) and *Veritatis Splendor*.
  - 4 Etymologically conscience means "to know together." For the original Greek word *syneidenai* means "knowing with (oneself)." Thomas also was aware of this meaning. See his *Questio Disputata De Veritate*, q. 17, art. 1, reply.



In the literature on moral development, conscience is presented as a rational part of the moral whole of the person. For example, Lawrence Kohlberg reserved the notion of conscience to the sixth stage in his scheme of moral development. According to him, conscience is simply the rational autonomy. It is shaped by cultural contribution and simultaneously it overcomes cultural constraints. For him conscience is beyond laws.<sup>5</sup>

*Veritatis Splendor* (hereafter abbreviated as VS) 58 presents a religious model of conscience, calling conscience as the secret core of human person. What is significant in this account of conscience is not an experience of law, but an encounter with God. It could be the reason why VS 64 speaks of the converted heart as the source of true judgments of conscience.

From among different conceptions of conscience, I opt for a rather person-oriented approach which renders conscience as "... the mature person in [moral] action."<sup>6</sup> More or less in the same vein, one may describe conscience as a "...a *dimension of the self*, one central to our experience of moral agency."<sup>7</sup> The above given description does not reduce conscience to its functions or properties. Briefly, conscience is the subjective dimension of the moral self which realizes itself by its continuous and diligent attention to the objective norms of morality, expressed through laws, authority, etc. In the following discussion on autonomy, we understand conscience not as a moral faculty but as the moral person in action—person in moral discernment.<sup>8</sup>

### Context of the Discussions on Autonomy of Conscience

Discussion on the autonomy of conscience is justified by both theological and philosophical contexts. Any sustained consideration of the autonomy of conscience has to take these contexts into account.

5 Lawrence Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development: The Philosophy of Moral Development*, Vol. 1 (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981) 6-28.

6 Paul Philibert, "The Search for an Adequate Theological Method in the Formation of Conscience," Russell E. Smith, ed., *Catholic Conscience: Foundation and Formation* (New Haven: The Knights of Columbus, 1991) 77.

7 Ann E. Patrick, *Liberating Conscience: Feminist Explorations in Catholic Moral Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1996) 35. Italics original.

8 This description can rightly be accused of being vague and rather imprecise. That is true. For we may not always get precision and certainty in ethics. Because there is a kind of complexity of issues that always characterize ethics. Even Thomas was aware of such complexity (ST II-II q. 49, a.3).

First, from a theological point of view, autonomy of conscience in its strictest form is usually understood as the self-rule or freedom of conscience.<sup>9</sup> But at stake is the question of the kind and extent of that freedom. Augustine held that since we are subjected to truth, we are free (*De Libero Arbitrio* II, XIII, 37; CC 29). In other words, only a true judgment or act of reason can guide freedom. To the extent one's conscience is true (makes true judgments), it is autonomous. Thomas' *Contra Gentiles* (III, 114) builds up this concept of autonomy. Giving due weight to the autonomy of conscience, at least by the high Middle Ages, it was recognised that no power can replace conscience. So Thomas held that if a person was demanded to embrace an unacceptable ecclesiastical decision under the threat of excommunication, s/he may not accept that under any circumstance, even if one was to die excommunicated. Autonomy of conscience in practice means that a person shall not be governed by his/her passions and inclinations, but by a disinterested pursuit of truth about the choice and a commitment to follow it. Similarly one must be free from popular and forceful opinions.

However, parallel to the recognition of the autonomy of conscience as mentioned above, autonomy has also been understood as the freedom of the moral agent from all external (objective) constraints to make his/her moral judgments. It lays stress on gaining certitude. But such absolute claims of autonomy has been refuted by the church. For example, John Paul II in *Dominium et Vivificantem* (48) says that "conscience is not an independent and exclusive capacity to decide what is good and what is evil." Surveying the whole theological context one might rightly say that it is still a theological due to explain the precise nature of the autonomy of conscience in a convincing language.

Secondly, in addition to the theological context, there is a philosophical background to the discussion on the autonomy of conscience. The conception of the autonomy of conscience commands added attention nowadays because, the philosophical sensibility to autonomy has been sharpened in various ethical theories.

The word autonomy originated from the Greek term *autonomia* which means a state of self-rule. In fact this term could be applied to states, persons and animals. But originally it was applied to city-states and

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9 Thomas Aquinas, *IV Sent.* 38, 2, 4 q. 3; *IV Sent.* 27, 1, 2. q. 4 ad 3.

societies.<sup>10</sup> Not much is known to us whether autonomy was applied to persons in ancient Greece.<sup>11</sup> It seems that autonomy as a capacity of persons was suggested for the first time in the late Middle Ages. It was William of Ockham (1285-1349) who developed for the first time a theory of free will as the predicate of inalienable human dignity. I do not trace the trajectory of the notion of autonomy in Western thought, which got powerful expressions in the political writings of John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, David Hume and Jean Jacques Rousseau.<sup>12</sup>

Almost all contemporary ethical theories make use of or presume the notion of autonomy. From the 1970s onwards the notion of autonomy appeared frequently in political and ethical theories.<sup>13</sup> Diverse use of the notion of autonomy has created different meanings for it in different contexts. For example, in medical ethics autonomy finds its place in the context of paternalism and informed consent; in business ethics in connection with advertising; in constitutional law with respect to the respect for privacy and free speech; in social policy in relation to minimal standard of welfare; in animal theology in view of debates over animal rights; in feminism with respect to the autonomy of women in patriarchal societies; in educational theories in the context of respecting the autonomy of students. Finally, in Kantian ethics autonomy has a different, though not entirely different, meaning.

The notion of autonomy is strongly associated with Immanuel Kant than with any other philosopher. However, the Kantian texts are highly abstract, heavily laden with his own terminology, densely compressed in seemingly outmoded metaphysical jargon. So to make a coherent articulation of any Kantian idea is frustratingly difficult. Many of the

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10 C.S. Lewis, *Studies in Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1961) 124-125.

11 A.W.H. Adkin, *From the Many to the One* (New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1970). Having said this, I must remark that Aristotle speaks of situations in which a person can be swayed by external circumstances. We might say that in those contexts he was speaking of autonomy of persons indirectly, without using the word *autonomia*. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1110a5-10, 1110a25, etc.

12 For a broad survey of this history see Anton Vedder, *The Values of Freedom* (Utrecht: Aurelio Domus Artium, 1995) 23-25.

13 The following authors, for instance, use it as theoretical basis of moral rights: John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971); Alan Gewirth, *Reason and Morality* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978); Ronald Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously* (London: Duckworth, 1978).

interpretations of Kant are condemned to be oversimplifications or even caricatures of Kant. Hence, the below given brief account on Kantian idea of autonomy cannot but be truncated.<sup>14</sup>

For Kant, autonomy is an axiomatic postulation—something which cannot be proven, but must be assumed. He formulates the idea of autonomy as the "... practical principle of the will as the supreme condition of the will's conformity with universal practical reason, viz., the idea of the will of very rational being as a will that legislates universal law."<sup>15</sup>

Kant based his ethics on the absolute subjectivity and autonomy of the moral agent. He held that humans were to be freed from all sorts of external constraints and pressures even from their own bodily inclination or natural tendencies towards the good. According to him, heteronomy or any kind of law imposed from outside would destroy freedom. It would amount to the destruction of morality itself. The only motive which can determine one's morality could be the sense of obligation or duty. In this sense Kant propounded a vision of absolute autonomy of moral agents.

Absolute autonomy allows that a moral agent can be determined only by laws which s/he gives her/himself through ones own reason. Such moral laws would be the same for all people, since human nature and reason are the same for all; such laws hence must be universalizable. Kant was of the opinion that even the truth of the teachings of Jesus must be subjected to this principle of universalizability before they being accepted as morally binding: "Even the holy One of the gospel himself first of all be measured against our ideal of moral perfection before one acknowledges him as such."<sup>16</sup> So for Kant autonomy was an absolute postulate of morality. The above made outline of the theological and philosophical contexts of the meaning of autonomy places us in a good stead to inquire into the meaning of autonomy of conscience in Christian morality.

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- 14 One way of explaining the Kantian notion of autonomy is to say what it is not. For a work in that line see Thomas E. Hill, Jr., *Dignity and Practical Reason in Kant's Moral Theory* (London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1992).
  - 15 Immanuel Kant, *Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans., J. W. Ellington (Cambridge: Hackett Pub., 1981) 38. This version of autonomy has invited a number of critiques from different quarters. For example, Joel Feinberg, *Harm to Self* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986) 94.
  - 16 Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, C4, trans., H.J. Paton (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964).



## Autonomy of Conscience:

### Dialectics between Subjective and Objective Poles

We might understand autonomy of conscience as the self-rule of conscience which is dialectically in relation to 'others.' Others in this context mean other persons as well as everything that determines one's moral subjectivity, such as the bible, laws, authority, and society. It could generally be called the 'objective pole.' When one engages in moral deliberation (or in the use of conscience) one's subjective pole fuses with the objective pole and creates a new dialectical moral domain, but without destroying either of them. So we could understand autonomy of conscience always in relation to heteronomy. In other words, autonomy of conscience is not absolute. Below I try to explain these propositions and examine rather elaborately whether these claims might be justified by Thomistic theology.

The relation between the subjective and objective poles is characterised here as dialectical, in the sense of conscience grasping the opposites in unity.<sup>17</sup> Because strictly speaking autonomy means independence from others. By independence from others we maintain our autonomy, but our identity (of the self) is dependent on others. As Carol Gilligan writes, "we know ourselves as separate only insofar as we live in connection with others, and that we experience relationship only insofar as we differentiate other from self."<sup>18</sup> Relationality determines our moral self. MacIntyre describes it as follows: "I am brother, cousin, and grandson, member of this household, that village, this tribe. These are not characteristics that belong to the human beings accidentally, to be stripped away in order to discover "the real me." They are part of my substance, defining partially at least and sometimes wholly my obligations and my duties."<sup>19</sup> So there is a kind of dialectics in our autonomy: we maintain our autonomous identity by keeping our heteronomous self. Applying this (dialectical) notion of autonomy to the realm of human action, Thomas Nagel writes: "I wish to be able to subject my motives, principles, and habits to critical examination, so that nothing moves me

17 The notion of dialectics needs to be clarified. I use it in its original Hegelian sense.

18 Carol Gilligan, *In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (London: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982) 63.

19 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (London: Duckworth, 1997) 33.

to action without any agreeing to it. In this way, the setting against which I act is gradually enlarged and extended inward, till it includes more and more myself, considered as one of the outcomes of the world.”<sup>20</sup>

The core of the above given description is that autonomy of conscience always presupposes a dialectical relationship between autonomy and heteronomy. This claim brings in the burden of further substantiation, despite some reference to a few solid ethicists. Hence, to corroborate the claim that autonomy necessarily implies heteronomy, I depend on and extrapolate the Thomistic ideas on *ratio practica*, prudence and conscience.

### **Ratio Practica: A Case in Point**

Thomas dealt with what we now call conscience in his discussions on the virtue of prudence. Thomas called prudence “directing cognition” or even the “*virtus intellectualis circa moralia*”—the intellectual virtue concerned with morality (*De Virtibus Card.* 1). Prudence and conscience are not identical in Thomas.<sup>21</sup> However, one might admit in practice that in the case of a virtuous wo/man conscience and prudence effectively coalesce. What is significant about the Thomistic notion of prudence is that he talks of it as a functioning of practical reason (*ratio practica*).<sup>22</sup> Closer examination might reveal that functions of conscience as we understand now are similar to that of *ratio practica*. Moreover, while explaining the judgments of conscience, Thomas refers to the expression *ratio vel conscientia* (ST I-II q. 19, art. 5) and accordingly conscience is the application of the rules of *recta ratio* in actual situations (ST I, q. 79, a. 13). Building upon this similarity and interpreting Thomas, below I argue that autonomy of conscience is limited by its necessary reference to the objective stakes (pole).

*Ratio practica* is not just intelligence; rather it is a transformation of intelligence in constant conversations with various appetites into a force that judges, weights, measures and finally commands the ‘appropriate’ action.<sup>23</sup> (ST I-II, q. 90, a. 1). The specific reason why I link the Thomistic

20 Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986) 119.

21 Ralph McInerny, “Prudence and Conscience,” *Thomist* 38 (1974) 291-305.

22 The concept of practical reason is suggestive and complex. Generally speaking, it amounts to a way of reasoning used in ethics as different from mere abstract logic.

23 Paul Philibert, “The Search for an Adequate Theological Method in the

idea of *ratio practica* with conscience is that Thomas seems to characterise *ratio practica* as reason at work in the service of ethics. That actually is the function of conscience. However, *ratio practica* (and in our case, conscience) is not identical with speculative reason. Explaining the nature of *ratio practica* by differentiating it from speculative reason, Thomas writes:

The business of theoretic reason is with natural truths that cannot be otherwise, and so without mistake it finds truth in the particular conclusions it draws as in the premises it starts from. Whereas the business of the practical reason is with contingent matters which are the domain of human acts, and although there is some necessity in general principles the more we get down to particular cases the more we can be mistaken. (*ST I-II*, q. 94, a. 4).

The variety and differences among the acts of the will lead Thomas to use the term *ratio practica* specifically to distinguish the method of moral reasoning from that of strictly scientific knowledge: "Therefore one finds something in practical reason which is related to operations just as a proposition in speculative reason is related to conclusions" (*ST I-II*, q. 90, a. 1 ad 2).

Specifying the nature of *ratio practica*, while distinguishing it from speculative reason, we have to point out that *ratio practica* is bound to the recognition of circumstantiality in morality. Thomas writes that in human beings goodness does not exist *per se* (*ST I-II*, q. 18, a.1). He means that only in God, goodness is substantial and constitutional. "Human actions are good or bad according to their circumstances" (*ST I-II*, q. 18, a. 3). Here we cannot miss an important Thomistic insight that the good is that which is according to reason, but reasonableness is discovered circumstantially (*ST I-II*, q. 18, a. 10). He seems to suggest that circumstance reveals the pattern of reasonability or intelligibility (of moral acts). Thomas gives an example that shows the difference between speculative reason and *ratio practica*: that things kept in trust should be returned upon request is a conclusion of speculative reason which applies to all people always. But when *ratio practica* applies this proposition to individual behaviour, the truth of it is not the same for all people. If someone knows that the sword held in trust is asked for by its owner and he is going to misuse it, s/he should not return it

(*ST* I-II, q. 94, a.4).<sup>24</sup> What is remarkable is that *ratio practica* implies a critical awareness of the circumstances in making moral judgments. That means, a moral decision must occur not just in compliance with the objective demands but in relation to subjective awareness of the circumstance.

In other words, *ratio practica* is not just a function of intellection, but of volition and affection. It not only knows but "commands," "petitions," and "begs" the agent toward the perceived good (*ST* I, q. 82, a. 4). This link to the good is vital to the notion of *ratio practica*. For, an amount of affection determines the reasonableness of the good.<sup>25</sup> The point is that for Thomas, practical reason perfected by moral virtues has a connatural orientation to the good. Using the example of prudence Thomas says that, that the kind of person one is, determines how one perceives the good (*ST* I-II, q. 57, a. 5).

Alasdair MacIntyre, primarily with a Thomistic note, speaks about the function of practical reason as of entering into a dialogue with the appetites or sensibilities: "We have to begin by acquiring enough of the virtues to order our passions aright, so that we are neither distracted nor misled by the multiplicity of the goods which seem to propose to us and so that we acquire the initial experience of rule-following and action-guiding from which we can begin to learn both how to understand our precepts and maxims better and how to extend the application of those precepts and maxims to an increasing range of particular situations."<sup>26</sup>

In the light of the Thomistic idea of *ratio practica*, we might surmise that autonomy of conscience presupposes that conscience retains its elemental perception of what is good to a human person which Thomas called the *synteresis*. It is the instinctive or primordial sense of what is good. Naturally it would be about fundamental goods. Autonomy does not mean that moral deliberation need no dialogue nor any rational justification. For autonomy of conscience has to be understood in a very specific sense. Conscience is a special kind of knowledge about good which simultaneously demands us to do certain things to achieve

24 Daniel C. Maguire, "Ratio Practica and the Intellectualistic Fallacy," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 10 (1982) 24-25.

25 This claim requires further research on Thomistic epistemology and psychology.

26 Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 130.



that good. In this sense both reason and will are simultaneously involved in this process.<sup>27</sup> In this process one retains his/her subjective pole by interpreting the morally relevant circumstances and respects the objective pole by giving ascent to the perceived good.

After having explained the heteronomy-dependent autonomy of conscience, I make mention of two specific areas which require further attention while dealing with the autonomy of conscience. They are reference to truth and authority. The purpose of treating these two topics is not to settle all issues related to them, rather to suggest the complexity of issues involved in them in view of the autonomy of conscience.

### Truth and Authority in View of the Autonomy of Conscience

First, any discourse about the autonomy of conscience usually makes unflinching mention of conscience's necessary allegiance to truth. For instance, C. Caffarra writes that "autonomy of conscience means the ability to arrive at a judgment free from the conditioning of popular opinion and free from one's own passions and interests, solely in one's submission to truth."<sup>28</sup> This idea is a rough restatement of what Vatican II taught as follows: "In fidelity to conscience, Christians are joined with the rest of people in search for truth, and for the genuine solution to the numerous problems which arise in the life of the individuals and from social relationships" (GS 16). In its document on religious freedom Vatican II says that "The sacred synod likewise professes its belief that it is upon human conscience that these obligations [to know and respect truth] fall and exert their binding force. The truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance into the mind at once quietly and with power" (DH 1).

Reference to truth actually confirms the autonomy of conscience. For the council teaches that we are bound to obey our conscience, while admitting that the conscience frequently errs due to invincible ignorance which does not corrupt its dignity (GS 16).<sup>29</sup> At the same

27 Protestantism has gone to the other extreme of denigrating reason in moral life.

28 Carlo Caffarra, "The Autonomy of Conscience and Subjection to Truth," John M. Haas, ed., *Crisis of Conscience* (New York: The Crossroad Pub. Co., 1996) 165.

29 In this context we have to make a historical note that very often erroneous conscience was not 'tolerated' holding that 'error has no rights.' But even when one is in error, his/her human rights cannot be alienated. This was repudiated by Vatican II which distinguished between error and people in error who never lose their dignity (GS 27, 28).

time, we cannot overlook the fact "To the general statement that one should always follow one's conscience should be added that one should always question one's conscience. The autonomy of conscience is not absolute."<sup>30</sup>

Having said that autonomy of conscience always makes reference to truth, we have to recognise that the talk about truth in view of conscience is not as simple as it sounds. To verify this claim, let us turn to VS. This papal document uses the word "truth" or "the truth" on about every page of this document. But the document never describes what is meant by the word truth. One may even get the impression that according to VS, truth is an undifferentiated body of whatever has been taught in the past by the papal magisterium. Similarly VS never mentions about the hierarchy of truths—an indispensable category for a meaningful discussion about truth.

However, in VS 61 one might find at least three levels of truth being suggested. First, objective truth in itself; second, the declaration of that truth in reason; third, declaration of that truth in conscience.<sup>31</sup> One might even add another (fourth) category "... that truth about the good which the subject is called to seek" (VS 62). Accordingly, moral truth is conformity between the conscience and the ontological order in the universe; moral truth is conformity between conscience and the rightly ordered striving; moral truth is the conformity between conscience and the person's spiritual relationship with God. All these show that moral truth is an analogous idea.

Secondly, autonomy of conscience inevitably has to deal with the demands of authority as claims of the objective pole. Perhaps, it might be said that autonomy becomes meaningful only in the context of the authority of a community or the church. Because on the one hand, a community becomes meaningful only when it is composed of autonomous persons, lest it remain a herd of people; on the other hand, autonomy becomes meaningful only in the context of a community. "It is impossible to think of human beings except as part of ongoing communities, defined by reciprocal bonds of obligation, common traditions and institutions. ... The ideal of the autonomous person is

30 Daniel C. Maguire, *The Moral Choice* (New York: 1978) 379.

31 For details, Brian V. Johnstone, "Erroneous Conscience in *Veritatis Splendor* and the Theological Tradition," 121, 133.

that of an authentic individual whose self-determination is as complete as is consistent with the requirements that he is, of course, a member of a community."<sup>32</sup> In this sense we might understand authority as an aspect of one's belongingness to a faith community or the church. However, we cannot talk about authority as undifferentiated demands of the objective pole.

Vatican II speaks of different sorts of authorities exercised in the church. For instance, authority of the Bible as a privileged medium of God's words; the particular authority of the magisterium to proclaim church teaching normatively in service of that word (DV 10); the authority of the whole church as a body of believers who possess an instinct or sense of faith that allows them to recognise and respond to that word (LG 12); the carefully circumscribed competence of the church's pastors and the authority of the laity to apply the gospel to complex questions that arise in the world (GS 43); the inviolable authority of individual conscience (GS 16; DH 3); the authority of the scholars and theologians by virtue of their expertise (GS 62, 44; AG 22). These texts do not specifically say that they are referring to moral authority. It seems that those texts also presume moral authority.

How is a conscience subjected to the various above mentioned kinds of authority? It is an intriguing issue. Let us take the Bible as an example. Nobody could turn to the Bible to know definitively about interest-taking, many questions in sexual ethics, religious liberty, business ethics and international law. Most of what we can deduce from the bible is limited to sacredness of life, dignity of human person, the idea that morality is an operation of love, etc. Similarly it is doubtful whether Jesus closed the case, even when he was very clear on the divorce issue. Edward Schillebeeckx writes:

It is important to bear in mind that, although Christ declared that marriage was indissoluble, he did not tell us where the element that constituted marriage was situated—what in fact made a marriage a marriage, what made it the reality which he called absolutely indissoluble. This is a problem of anthropology.<sup>33</sup>

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32 Joel Feinberg, *Harm to Self*, 47.

33 Edward Schillebeeckx, *Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery* (New York, 1965) 389. After this work a number of significant works have appeared about this topic. A recent work in this area: Kenneth R. Himes & James A. Coriden, "The Indissolubility of Marriage: Reasons to Reconsider," *Theological Studies* 65 (2004) 453-499.

The so-called Pauline privilege which permits a person to contract the second valid marriage for reasons of faith while the first partner still lives is not found in Paul. It is based on I Cor. 7: 15. R. Schnackenburg points out that "Paul is dealing with the question whether separation is permissible in such a case; he does not speak of remarriage."<sup>34</sup> That means, the church as the faith-community went beyond the Scripture in this instance. The authority of the scripture has been subjected to the interpretation of the faith-community; at the same time, the faith-community is continuously challenged and determined by the bible. This apparently simple example demonstrates how intriguing could be the issues involved in interpreting the sources of authority.

What must be the authority of the church as far as conscience is concerned? Vatican II (DH 14) teaches that, "in the formation of their consciences the faithful ought carefully to attend to [*diligenter attendere debent*] the sacred and certain doctrine of the Church." Richard Gula notes that the conciliar fathers voted against a more restrictive expression of this text which could have asked the faithful to form their conscience "according to the teachings of the church."<sup>35</sup>

While speaking about authority and truth in reference to conscience, we need to recognise that autonomy of conscience was a topic which was once opposed by the church. It was condemned by Pius IX in his *Quanta Cura* as follows: "... that erroneous opinion which is especially injurious to the Catholic church and the salvation of souls, called by our predecessor Gregory XVI *deliramentum* [insane raving], namely that freedom of conscience and of worship is the proper right of each man and that this should be proclaimed and asserted in every rightly constituted society."<sup>36</sup> But later the church (cautiously) recognised the value of the autonomy of conscience. An example that shows this shift of understanding could be the condemnation of Joan of Arc, a 19 year old illiterate girl, declared guilty of heresy in 1431. She was tried and condemned by the university of Paris and a tribunal constituted of one cardinal, six bishops, thirty-two doctors of theology, sixteen bachelors of theology, seven doctors of medicine and, one hundred and three

34 Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Moral Teaching of the New Testament* (New York, 1965) 249.

35 Richard M. Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality* (New York: Paulist, 1989) 159.

36 Denzinger, 1690.



other officials. She abided by her conscience, even at the threat of a cruel death. She was burned in the presence of a large crowd. But after five hundred years, she was canonised by pope Benedict XV as a saint.<sup>37</sup>

### The Extent of the Autonomy of Conscience

Perhaps, one of the remaining interesting questions to be raised in connection with the autonomy of conscience is how far the autonomy of conscience can go. Is there any element of the objective pole of morality which cannot be judged by one's own certain conscience? Obviously, it is not easy to address this question. However, to suggest the complexity of the issues involved in this matter, I mention a case below.

A document was signed on 10 July 1993 by three German bishops, Oskar Saier, Karl Lehmann and Walter Kasper concerning the divorced people who remarry. They held that under certain conditions a Catholic could legitimately receive Holy Communion, even if the first consummated marriage was valid and even though s/he has sexual union with the person s/he now lives with. These bishops noted that the decision had to be taken on the basis of the judgment of one's conscience. They visualised it as an internal forum strategy. This judgment of these bishop-theologians was very remarkable. "For the first time in the church's history, the church itself has recognized through its ministers, that there is no structure which should not be verified or cannot be falsified by the judgment of the individual conscience."<sup>38</sup>

However, the above mentioned proposal invited many critiques, most importantly from the CDF.<sup>39</sup> I do not venture to examine the merit of the proposal here, which in itself will require extensive and thorough-going consideration about the indissolubility of marriages *ratum et consummatum*.<sup>40</sup> But the only point I wished to raise here is that the

37 Joan of Arc is described as a martyr in Bruno Chenu, et al., *The Book of Christian Martyrs* (New York: Croassroad, 1990) 97.

38 Carlo Caffarra, "The Autonomy of Conscience and Subjection to Truth," 151. For the text of the bishops: *Herder Korrespondenz* (September 1993) 460-467, especially IV, 4, p. 465.

39 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Reception of Communion: Divorced and Remarried Catholics," *Origins* 24 (October 27, 1994) 337-341.

40 For such a recent attempt with many irresistible theological claims, see Kenneth R. Himes & James A. Coriden, "The Indissolubility of Marriage: Reasons to Reconsider," *Theological Studies* 65 (2004) 453-499.

extent of the autonomy of conscience is a topic that requires further sustained theological considerations in view of truth and authority.

### Conclusion

The above made attempt in explaining the nature of the autonomy of conscience cannot claim comprehensiveness in its treatment. Many of those claims might be characterised as truncated, hence they stand in need of better elaboration and further substantiation.<sup>41</sup> However, this attempt was made out of the conviction that an adequate perception of the autonomy of conscience is to understand it as a creative and responsible tension between the objective and subjective poles of morality. Because both these poles are subjected to the claims of moral truth. That means, truth cannot be manipulated by the subjective pole or imposed by the objective pole. The following powerful statement of Vatican II is a sure guide in this respect: "The truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance into the mind at once quietly and with power" (DH 1). However, it still leaves the burden of finding out the moral truth in each and every practical question and, the how of it is a topic which requires another level of discussions.

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41 In addition to this, there are many interesting topics which deserve serious theological attention. I mention a scriptural example which occupied many Medieval theologians. Rom. 14: 23 says that "for all that is not from faith is sin."

# Conscience in Communion

**Paulachan Kochappilly**

*Conscience in Communion* is the topic taken up by Dr. Paulachan Kochappilly CMI who teaches Moral Theology at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore. The right or true Conscience depends on its conformity to truth and creativity for communion with God, with humanity, and with the whole creation. It is in communion with God that one forms one's conscience - how one gets to know the truth. It is through this basic communion one is able to face one's fellow beings, and enter into communion with them and with nature. The more one enters into this radical relationship the healthier, happier and holier will life be.

On 18 May 2004, Sonia Gandhi, the unanimously elected leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party enjoyed support from all allies paving the way for her to become India's Prime Minister, declared, "Today that inner voice tells me I must humbly decline this post." It was an assertion and a declaration on "inner voice" that is to be welcomed unconditionally and followed unflinchingly. In an atmosphere of political upheavals, the media, both print and electronic, gave a great coverage to the "inner voice." Indeed, it was the witness of a political leader of our country. The greatness of her "inner voice" becomes loud and clear when she elucidated her stance, "Power has never attracted me, nor has position been my goal. My aim has always been to defend the secular foundation of our nation and the poor of our country." And the dignity, integrity and beauty of the "inner voice" echoes in what she said, "I can understand your pain and anguish but kindly trust and allow me to take my decision." On the following day, scoring political mileage and international coverage, she pointed out, "We live in time when politics is about power. Let us show the world that for the Congress party, politics is about values and integrity." By this she was making a bold statement

on the truth of politics and the values to be treasured by leaders of every walk of life, especially of political leaders.

In the statement of Sonia, one encounters a woman who articulated her mind aloud and stood by it till the end (declining the post of Prime Minister). After the initial angry reactions of party workers to her pronouncements, she succeeded to win the heart of all the citizens of India, including that of the opposition, since she stood by her "inner voice". By listening to it Sonia revealed her political moral integrity and dignity. *The Constitution on Church in the Modern World* explicitly underscores this aspect of conscience, "[Human] dignity lies in observing this law" (GS 16). This reiterates that those who walk the way of the "inner voice" will be considered great by people of good will. This highlights that there are people who follow their clear conscience closely in every walk of life, including politics. People who are in communion with values – both temporal and eternal values founded on truth – will be communicating them and will be committed in the community towards the deeper communion. They will be the shining and guiding stars in the firmament of human history.

In this connection, it might be of importance to recollect Sir Thomas More who stood for his "inner voice", even when it meant great humiliation and annihilation. Robert Bolt in *A Man for All Seasons* gives memorable dialogue and penetrating insight into the functioning and force of conscience. To the question of Norfolk, Thomas More answers, "And when we stand before God, and you are sent to Paradise for doing according to your conscience, and I am damned for not doing according to mine, will you come with me, for fellowship?" At this Cranmer asks, "So those of us whose names are there are damned, Sir Thomas?" To this Thomas More replies, "I don't know, Your Grace. I have no window to look into another man's conscience. I condemn no one" (Gula, 134). It is a pointer to the source of the "inner voice." The spring of the "inner voice" is God, who is true, good and beautiful. It is resonated at the core of the person or conscience and is formed and refined as a result of the personal communion with God. There the person is alone with God. She or he encounters God in her or his heart. Hence conscience "is man's most secret core and his sanctuary" (GS 16). In other words, conscience or "inner voice" is secret and sacred. Conscience is secret, for it is hidden from others. And conscience is sacred, for it is one with God. Consequently, one is compelled from within to think, talk and walk the way of "inner voice" or conscience.



Fundamentally, conscience is formed in dialogue with God. It is dialogical in character (Kochappilly, 739). The “inner force” flows from the personal communion with God – the truth, the way and the life (*John* 16: 4).

The moment one gets in touch with the truth, there is the urgency and exigency to attend to the voice. And the voice is reverberated in the context of a communion – one’s communion with the truth. It is for the communion with God, Sir Thomas More considered everything else as waste. As it is obvious in the story of Sir Thomas More, the voice is not heard in isolation but in relation with the community.

Conscience, in the classical traditional understanding, is the judgement of the practical reason on the goodness or sinfulness of an action. This judgement is facilitated by the divine assistance and is passed in the presence of the Divine, for there the person is alone with God. Since every human person is made in the image of God, the connectivity and communicability with God is something natural and fundamental. In other words, every human person is or could be in communion with the Divine. In light of the communication and communion with God, person is in a position to discern the design of God, which, in turn, will please God and fulfil the human nature. It is like an online communication. As a result of the conversation an adequate decision is made to strengthen the bond of communion. That is to say that conscience discovers the law inscribed by the Divine on human hearts, which directs human beings “to love and do what is good and avoid evil” (*GS* 16). This does not in anyway guarantee that everyone is always in perfect connectivity with God. There are possibilities for log off from the network of one’s essential connection or relation, depending on the personal system and the adequate and accurate management of it. One thing is certain that when a person is online with the Divine network in the cave of one’s heart, the conscience will definitely stand for communion.

Conscience, though present as a faculty from the very beginning, needs to be equipped and enabled through proper installations and configurations. It is like equipping the personal system with all the accessories essential to log in to the internet connection and communication. This means that the right or true conscience depends on conformity with truth and creativity in depth for communion. This requires training and skill. And this is acquired by individuals in the community depending on one’s openness to truth and responsible use

of freedom. This is like learning and speaking a language by a child. "A useful analogy might be to compare conscience to the faculty of speech. The faculty of speech is there from the start, but it is unformed, a naked capacity. As we grow up we will learn to speak; but we do not just learn to speak, we learn to speak English or Irish or Italian or whatever. The capacity is formed according to the language of the culture to which we belong" (Harrington, 167). Bernard Häring emphasises the inner dynamism of conscience as faithful and free for truth. He observes, "Moral theology cannot be computerised for all time. . . . Past wisdom must be treasured. But the true virtue of wisdom does not lie in self-sufficiency. Instead, it draws one into the process of ongoing mutuality, in which one shared from the depth of conscience and for the sake of fidelity to conscience" (Häring, 67-68).

Evidently there are no readymade answers or solutions to all the moral questions or problems of all times. There are difficult moral situations "where our acquired wisdom stops and where the contours of this situation start" (Harrington, 166). The Magisterium also attests importance to this ongoing formation of conscience and the need to collaborate with the people of other faiths in seeking solutions to common moral issues (GS 16). All these attestations clearly reveal one thing: conscience is in need of formation and it undergoes formation, of course, with openness and readiness to embrace the truth. Such a formation of conscience takes place in communion with the ethos of a community. It is crucial to rediscover the Christian ethos in order to inform, and transform one's conscience. It is the ethos of the Christian community, which is fundamentally Trinitarian and communitarian, that shapes one's conscience. Practically speaking it is in communion with the ethos of the Church, a Christian moulds her or his conscience.

At this juncture it is important to address the debate on moral conscience and the superego. One of the confusions in this regard is that conscience is identified with superego. We need to clear up the confusion, for conscience is shaped in communion with the ethos of the community. In this respect it is of great relevance to distinguish conscience from superego, which according to the Freudian school of psychology is the ego of another superimposed on our own to serve as an internal censor to regulate our conduct by using guilt as its powerful weapon. While we admit that the ethos of the community has an enviable role to form one's conscience, we need to underline that conscience is both free and faithful. Richard M. Gula offers a systematic understanding

on the distinctions between superego and conscience, which are originally proposed by John W. Glaser. These distinctions thoroughly clarify the notions concerning superego and conscience. They could be summarised as follows: a) superego commands us to act whereas conscience is a response to an invitation; b) superego is turned towards self whereas conscience has a fundamental openness to the other; c) superego is static whereas conscience is dynamic; d) superego respects authority blindly whereas conscience respects values; e) superego attends to the individual acts whereas conscience pays attention to the larger process or pattern; f) superego focuses on the past whereas conscience capitalises on the future; g) superego attains quick reconciliation through punishment whereas conscience achieves reconciliation through the structuring of the future; h) superego manages self-renewal rapidly whereas conscience acquires self-renewal gradually; i) superego undergoes a disproportionate guilt feeling whereas conscience undertakes only a proportionate feeling of guilt (Gula, 127). All these distinctions make the formation and function of conscience different from superego proposed by psychologists. Nevertheless, there are some commonalities verifiable at the initial stage of the formation of conscience.

Ethos of a community has a lion's share in moulding the conscience of the members, for it offers the imagination, motivation, and horizon necessary for supporting and promoting personal and communal life towards its wholeness, fullness and holiness. The Christian ethos is fundamentally an existential experience and expression of the people redeemed and being redeemed in Christ through the Holy Spirit for the glory of God. It is the ethos of the eucharist – a remembrance of the Lord and renewal of life in gratitude for the wonderful gift of salvation through the mystery of the Cross. According to Christos Yannaras, "The communal ethos of the Church is not an abstract ethical theory, nor a system of values codified into commandments. It is the fact of the eucharist and its extension to the universal dimensions of life, the dynamic realisation of personal distinctiveness and freedom in the context of the encounter between human effort and divine grace" (Yannaras, 229). Again this explains the fundamental dynamism in the formation of Christian conscience: it is in and through the communion with the Eucharistic community. Furthermore, the author strikes an important note on the morality of the Gospel as "the absolute antithesis of any kind of individual ethics, since it presupposes the transformation of individuality into an existential reality of communion and relationship"

(Yannaras, 53). In this process of communion, he capitalises on the aspect of freedom in making a moral judgement. "The right and wrong in each case, the good and the evil, can be judged only by the measure of the realisation of freedom, which is sacrificial self-transcendence and a struggle to attain communion" (Yannaras, 217).

In this process of conscience formation, there is a tendency to conformity and creativity. The question very often one confronts in this connection is: conformity or creativity? Generally one goes for either of them. But it need not be and is not the genuine conception of conscience. In fact, right conscience is formed in conformity with and creativity in truth – that is, in communion with truth. There is fidelity and liberty to and for truth. Conscience to be creative needs to be founded in truth. And conscience to be in conformity with truth presupposes it to be creative and liberative. Therefore, they are not to be seen in opposition to each other, but should be understood as complementing. As for conscience to be right it should be in conformity with truth so also conscience is to be creative in order to be liberative. Demonstrating the dynamism and healthy tension of conscience, Donal Harrington compares it to a chef or to an artist or to a composer. "Each of these starts off by learning the rules, whether it be using the oven or working with colours or learning an instrument. Some go no further and what they produce is plain and unexciting, but solid. Others become great and they achieve this because they play around with possibilities, going beyond the rules they learned. Certainly if they had done no more than keep to the rules they would never have known greatness" (Harrington, p.166). It reiterates the importance of both conformity and creativity in the formation of conscience. A masterly stroke or a note makes a big difference on the canvas or in a composition. This does not mean that the masterly touch is out of the way. On the contrary, it is her or his isness and easiness within the circle that enables the artist to go beyond it.

A disciple has to follow the mind of the Master. Jesus, the Master, showed an extraordinary example in forming and following one's conscience. He was a champion of conformity and creativity with the sense of objectivity. While observing the Sabbath in truth, Jesus reiterated the original divine design of it, "The Sabbath was made for the human, and not the human for the Sabbath" (*Mark 2: 27*). It was highly a revolutionary statement for all times which revealed the truth. Take the episode of the woman caught in adultery. She was brought to Jesus for



cross examination and consequent punishment by the Pharisees. Jesus said promptly but prudently, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her" (*John* 8: 7). This does not mean that Jesus was blind to the sin of the sinner. While forgiving her sins, Jesus admonished her strongly, "Go your way, and from now on do not sin again" (*John* 8: 11). Another interesting and insightful incident was the debate on divorce. There Jesus helps the Pharisees to come to the truth of marriage. He accused the people for their "hardness of heart" (*Mark* 10: 5). Jesus reiterates the truth of marriage, "But from the beginning of creation 'God made them male and female.' For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (*Mark* 10: 6-8). Jesus makes no compromise but consistently commands the truth, "Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate" (*Mark* 10: 9). In all these cases Jesus projects the message of conformity with and creativity to truth in dealing with these moral issues. The aspect of conformity with truth is evident in all these cases. So also the aspect of creativity in acting along the line of truth and against the current customs is fundamental, though they were highly demanding.

In His words and works, Jesus emerges as a man of communion – a call and challenge to all Christians. He was perfectly in communion with the Father; He was thoroughly conscious of His mission; and He was fully filled with the Spirit. His way of communion is an excellent example and perfect model for all human beings. The communion is marked by the consciousness or awareness of the Father who sent Jesus, the consciousness of oneself as anointed, that is, the Messiah; and the consciousness of oneself being filled with the Spirit. Such a communion is visible in the person of Jesus from the moment of His baptism in the river Jordan. We see Jesus ever faithful to the Father, truthful to His identity as the Son of the Father and fruitful in His mission in the Spirit.

It is useful to analyse the teaching of Jesus to have a closer look at the dynamism involved in the articulation of Jesus' conscience. Take for instance the Sermon on the Mount. Let us examine the teaching of Jesus on love for enemies (*Matthew* 5: 43-45). In perfect communion with the Father, Jesus reveals the truth of human beings as the children of God; in recognition of His mission, Jesus discloses and defends the truth concerning authority; and in tune with the working of the Spirit, Jesus invites people to love their enemies with novelty and originality. A

Christian is invited to have the mind of Christ. As Jesus preaches or performs, there is a perfect communion. This communion can be illustrated in this following structure.

**Abba consciousness** – “Children of your Father” (v. 45) -

**Faithfulness - fidelity**

**Messiah consciousness** – “But I say to you” (v. 44) -

**Truthfulness - identity**

**Pneuma consciousness** – “Love your enemies” (v. 44) -

**Fruitfulness - liberty**

In this teaching of Jesus, there is fidelity (since Jesus is in union with the Father and establishes the objective truth); there is identity (since Jesus is anointed to preach the good news to the poor); and there is liberty (since Jesus is filled with the Spirit). A person open to the truth, faithful to the identity and fruitfulness in life could be said to be in communion with God - truth, goodness and bliss. A person who is faithful, truthful and fruitful in her or his experiment with truth can be assured of forming and functioning with a right conscience. In such circumstances all the aspirations, articulations and actions of a person reveal one's fidelity, identity and liberty in and for truth. And the dignity of the person consists in walking the way of conscience formed in and functions for communion. Jesus Christ is the living and moving example of such a formation of conscience in communion. It is this foundation in communion and orientation for communion, which make people healthy, happy and holy.

Now it is necessary to enter into a brief discussion on different spheres or areas of interaction and communion which further illustrate the various factors that should influence in the forming and functioning of one's conscience. Bernard Häring points to the need for such an investigation. He writes, “I see conscience (Greek *Syneidesis*, Latin *Conscientia*) as a knowing of one's self and the world in company with others. Conscience comes to its full flowering when it implies knowing one's self and one's interrelatedness with others in the sight of God, knowing that we are ‘known’ by God, and viewing ourselves and our relationship with others from that vantage point” (Häring, 60). It is evident that the disposition, discernment and decision of conscience depends on its communion with manifold relations.

In what follows we shall focus on conscience in communion at three spheres of Christian existence, namely, (i) person; (ii) reason; (iii)

revelation. In fact, there is no real separation among these spheres of Christian living. All these spheres mingle and merge in real life. But these distinctions are made only for a better understanding and personal transformation. Besides, these three are the foundations of Christian ethics, for these three factors constitute the essentials of Christian ethos.

### 1. Person

Etymologically, the term “person” means “facing towards.” Person is one who faces others and the Other. The authenticity of a person depends on her or his ability in facing others. For the progress, success and maturity of a person, one has to be facing others. The more one faces others, the greater one’s personality. This is all the more true of holiness. The holiness of a person depends on the ability to enlarge and encompass the relationship through facing. A person who faces others truthfully, freely and joyfully has the moral integrity and human dignity. Three fundamental areas of human relation are: God, human beings and creation. At every stage of conscience, hence, there is the need of communion with the Other-Neighbour-Nature.

It is in communion with God, a person forms one’s conscience, for there s/he is alone with God. It is this union with God and constant relationship with the Divine, a person gets to know the truth, goodness and beauty, for God is the source of all these. The more a person is in union and communion with God, s/he is in a position to discern what is eternal and temporal, true and false, good and evil, beauty and ugly, etc. And the possibility for this communion with God is fundamentally and permanently present in every human being, since each one is created in the image and likeness of God. This is the fundamental openness to God. This openness stimulates people facing God. The more you face God, the greater is the attraction, appreciation and assimilation with regard to truth, goodness and beauty. This basic nature of human being facilitates liking, loving and living the design of God for the world. Since God is truth and truth alone can set us free, we need to get in touch with God to know, love and follow the truth. Without this foundational relation, there is no way for forming a true conscience. Hence communion with the Divine is essential for the creative and critical functioning of conscience.

Next is the communion with fellow beings. The basic constitution of human person enables each and everyone to face others and enter into union and communion. There are, indeed, different degrees and

grades, for this communion with fellow beings. By facing each other a relation is on the making. The more you do it, the greater is the bond or union. As one faces others, so one knows one's own rights and duties. This knowledge is a must for a harmonious community life. In this sense, it is in communion with the people of the community one has to form one's conscience. To be sensitive to the needs (not greed) of the people is a must for the formation of right and just conscience. Since everyone is made in the image of God, there is the need for respecting the indwelling presence of the Divine in the human. In order to know the exigencies of the people, facing the human situation is a must. Only in communion with the community we can form a just and right conscience, by responding to the divine invitation .

The communion with creation or nature is also very important and urgent in forming a right conscience. Only by facing the mother nature one comes to understand the radical relationship human beings should nurture and foster with the whole world. If one is blind or forgetful about the inherent interrelatedness of beings and bodies in the universe, there will be no recognition, respect and response adequate to the full flourishing of everyone and everything in the world. Whatever, wherever, whenever, and whoever does in nature has a repercussion on something, somewhere, sometime, someone. It is a matter of learning through facing nature. The more one returns to and restores one's radical relationship with nature, the healthier, happier and holier life will be. This is of paramount importance in the present day ecological crisis of alarming proportion.

## **2. Reason**

Another sphere of communion is human reason. It is the human reason which generalises and universalises. Human beings created in the image of God participate in the Divine mind and wisdom. This is the ground for universal appeal and applicability. All persons endowed with reason have the capacity to know, love and live the truth, goodness and bliss, for which everyone is designed and destined by God. By virtue of human reason a person is in a position to come to have communion with the community and communicate the truth, goodness and bliss to the members of the community.

It is in communion with the object of the moral act that we make certain judgement concerning the goodness or sinfulness of an action. The object of an act can be good, evil or indifferent. It is the object of



the act which is the primary source of moral act. Neither circumstances nor intention can make an object good if it is evil in itself. Therefore, in forming our right conscience we have to seek an object which is good in itself. This is an area where we need to pay greater attention, for there is threat to the truth from all quarters of life in the name of progress and success. In this connection, Joseph Ratzinger makes an important observation. He writes, "The concept of truth has been virtually given up and replaced by the concept of progress. Progress itself "is" the truth. But through this seeming exaltation, progress loses its direction and becomes nullified. For if no direction exists, everything can just as well be regress as progress" (Ratzinger, 10).

In communion with the circumstances of the moral act, there can be certain qualifications. Though the situations or circumstances cannot alter the objective truth of an action, the moral responsibility from the point of the subject or agent of the act may vary depending on the conditions under which one has executed the moral action. This does not mean that the situation makes good the object of the act which is evil in itself. It means that taking into account the details of the action, at the level of subjective evaluation of the act, the imputability of the act may be diminished or totally destroyed.

In communion with the end or the intention, there can be modifications on the morality of human action. Good intention alone is not enough, but action should be good as well. The saying of Jesus is illustrative of this truth, "Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (*Matthew 7: 21*). Oft repeated saying, "end does not justify the means" holds good.

### 3. Revelation

This understanding takes us to another area of conscience formation, that is, revelation. Along with person and reason, revelation gives the specificity and identity of Christian conscience. It is revelation which addresses the unique yet universal issues squarely.

Revelation in Christ reveals the dignity and destiny of human beings. It is the faith in revelation which confers on the members a sense of identity and specificity. The faith fills the members with vivid imagination, solid motivation, and candid orientation in life. In the forming of conscience, one has to be at home with all the tributaries of faith. The content of the revelation is at the very centre of one's ethos, since faith is at the heart of the person.

Three important spheres of Christian revelation are: the mystery of the Holy Trinity, Sacred Scripture, and the mystery of the Church. The mystery of the most Holy Trinity – Father, Son, and Spirit – forms the core of the revelation. The revelation of God in Christ through the working of the Spirit is the horizon of Christian faith and life. The Holy Bible is the account of the project and prospectus of the Divine intervention and human salvation. And the mystery of the Church is the context in which a Christian encounters the mystery of the Holy Trinity and understands the Sacred Scripture. To be true and certain a Christian in communion with all the elements of revelation should form one's conscience.

A Christian is a newly born in the mystery of the most Holy Trinity. It is in the love of the Father, in the compassion of Jesus Christ, and in the company of the Holy Spirit, a person is invited, introduced and initiated into Christian life. The mystery of the Trinity is the source and summit of Christian life. It is its force and focus. Every Christian is invited to live a life in Christ through the Holy Spirit for the glory of God. Hence, the mystery of the Trinity is an invitation to live a life of communion with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Such a communion with the mystery of the Trinity demands and enables the believing community to imbibe the love, grace and fellowship of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In the fashioning of the conscience, a Christian is to be absorbed by the creative power of the Father, the redemptive activity of Jesus Christ and liberative accompaniment of the Holy Spirit of the Godhead. In other words, a well informed and rightly formed Christian conscience will also be creative, redemptive and liberative in its operation.

Sacred Scripture is the torch on the path of a Christian. A Christian listens the voice of God in reading and understanding the Holy Bible. Though Sacred Scripture does not provide readymade answers for every question of our times, it gives a frame of mind or fundamental parameters to work in order to address the contemporary moral issues. What is to be sought is the Divine Design for our times with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. As we have noted earlier, the approach of Jesus was always to discover the Divine Design in times of dilemmas. Jesus was reiterating the plan of God by interpreting the will of God for the world. The images and figures of the Bible help the faithful tracing a convincing commitment for our times.

A Christian belongs to a redeemed and redeeming community in

Christ, that is, the Church. The Church sanctifies and is in need of sanctification. She is holy and sinful. Nevertheless the Church is the context of the encounter of the risen Lord. She is the sacrament of Christ. She makes Christ's words and works of redemption present to generations. The sacraments in the Church are celebrations of life in Christ. The Eucharist makes the Church; it is the Eucharistic gathering commemorating the commandments of the Lord for greater commitment in the Church for the welfare of the world. What the Church should be doing is to reconstruct the Eucharistic community – a community of *eucharistia* through *diakonia* for *koinonia*.

Focusing on the Eucharistic community and communion, Yannaras invites the faithful to recover the ideal Christian Eucharistic ethos. "It seems today the institutionalized church organisations are totally subject to the culture of the "external," the culture of utilitarianism and efficiency, of individual logic and individual ethics; but this does not mean that the ethos of eucharistic communion is impracticable within the framework of modern social life, any more that the alienation of sexual love in the same society means that people are quite incapable of being truly in love" (Yannaras, 225). What is urgent is to recapture the Eucharistic ethos for a life of covenant community and communion. In a similar vein Enda McDonagh appeals moral theologians to scrutinise the community awareness, understanding, decision and activity on equal footing with personal awareness, understanding, personal decision and personal activity. He finds fault with the "preoccupation with the person as distinct from the person-in-community." The author recommends to do moral theology "as based on both persons-in-community and community-of-persons" (McDonagh, 74). The Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, is persons-in-community and community-of-persons. And the celebration of the Eucharist makes this community visible, accessible and credible.

## Conclusion

Conscience acts in communion and for communion. It is ever in relation with the ethos of the community and functions for fuller relation with the Other, neighbour and nature. It is proper to say that conscience is the inner voice that bears witness to the truth, revealed and being unveiled, when situation so demands. It is in communion with the different aspects of human existence, like person, reason and revelation, conscience comes to pass a judgement concerning the goodness or sinfulness of an action. In judging thoughts, words and deeds, "we

decide *for* ourselves but we do not decide *by* ourselves" (Harrington, 170), meaning, conscience is not law unto itself, instead it discovers the law written by God in the heart of human beings. And the discovery of the Divine Design – to love and do good and avoid evil; to love God, neighbour and nature – depends on one's communion with the foundations of Christian ethics.

It is fitting to conclude this reflection on conscience with the words of Bernard Häring. He writes, "The most precious thing on earth is a healthy, alert and faithful conscience, free for others, free for all moral values, and able to discern the scale and urgency of values. The healthy conscience reflects the vision and experience of wholeness that create healthy relationships, a true co-humanity" (Häring, (1981), 214).

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# Conflict of Conscience An Activist's Viewpoint

Anjali Therese

Dr. Anjaly Therese DM who teaches Moral Theology in Institutes of Formation speaks of *Conflicts of Conscience* from the Activist's point of view. Such conflicts occur in many ways and on different occasions. They may arise from one's sticking to one's cultural world, from doing one's religious duties, from holding on to truthfulness in speech, and finally from conflicting demands of authority.

## Introduction

Making any kind of decisions in situations which involve conflicting duties and contrary values is an intriguing task. All the more so is a conscientious decision making process. It may lead a person to confront moral dilemmas of profound complexity. So the experience of conflict of conscience is a topic which deserves serious consideration in ethics. In this paper I try to expose the extent and examine the grounds of the possible conflicts of conscience rather from an activist's perspective. In effect, it means, I am not going to make a thorough-going ethical analysis of the issues involved in conflict of conscience; nor do I mean to propose the ways to resolve them. So this paper is primarily concerned with presenting various situations of the conflict of conscience which any sensible and responsible Christian might confront in his/her life.

Before I examine the various kinds of conflicts of conscience, let me make a couple of opening observations. First, admitting the possibility of conflicts of conscience has not been common in theological tradition. On the contrary, there was a tradition which simply denied all moral conflicts, namely, that of the manuals of moral theology. According to the manuals, conflicts of values were possible on the level of physical

values, but not on the level of moral values. The manualists were guided by the natural law understanding of the universe. All moral laws, according to them, are hierarchically structured which allow no chance of internal conflicts. The only thing required of the moral agent is to conform him/herself to the demands of natural law. What they at the most admitted was that there could be conflicts of values due to the agents' ignorance which they called as an apparent *collisio officiorum*.<sup>1</sup> It seems that the manualists permitted an evil action, if it did not constitute an intrinsic evil and if it was not directly willed by the agent. One can say that this approach did not recognise the evil contained in the situation. It was just an evasive step to keep one's conscience clean of guilt feelings.

However, the contemporary church is sensitive enough to the ethical complexities in practical life. For example, Vatican II while dealing with the issues of war and peace admitted the "complexity of matters as they stand" (GS 77-90), though it does not directly speak of the conflicts of conscience.

Secondly, conflict of conscience shall not be understood here as conflicting moral interpretations of reality that exist in a society. For example, one may judge artificial conception to be contrary to human nature, whereas others may see it as a fruitful application of technology to help a person in need. Or one may judge just war as acceptable, while others may opt for pacifism. These contrary judgments of reality are not examples of the conflicts of conscience. Rather they are different moral evaluations of realities. But conflict of conscience leads a person into a dilemma in which none of the available options seems acceptable. Thus one may have to struggle hard with the basic question of morality, namely, 'what ought I to do?'

Conflict of conscience can occur in various ways. I mention four such ways in general terms. They are conflicts that emanate from the conflicting demands of the cultural world in which one finds him/herself and one's own personal perception of reality; conflicting religious and ethical demands, conflict due to an indispensable choice between two or more evil options; and one's conflict with authority, in choosing

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1 For details on the approach of the manualists towards conflict of conscience see, Nicholas Crotty, "Conscience and Conflict," *Theological Studies* 32 (1971) 209-212.

proportionate means for ends, and in taking exceptions from the formal norms.

### **Conscience and Conflicting Demands of One's Cultural World**

The demands of one's own socio-cultural world may create a kind of conflict of conscience for a thoughtful and sensitive person. For one's perception of the self and its relation to the world at large are largely determined by one's cultural lifeworld. This scenario can create conflict of conscience in different ways. I give examples from two perspectives.

First, in a world which places self-realization on the top most human value, freedom of conscience will rank very high. In this context, the individual's right against the society shall be upheld. In this scheme, an individual's intentions shall be valued highly. An individual who is supposed to be accountable before God need not worry much about the consequences of the acts which he did in good faith. The problem is that the aspect of the community is lacking here. So ultimately we come to the question whether freedom is communitarian or individualistic. One could generally say that the Western world is punctuated more with an individualistic approach. However, we cannot say that it is purely individualistic, but intersubjective dimensions are also ingrained in it.

In the above mentioned situation conflict of conscience can occur whenever an individual feels or shows greater sympathy to the social group or s/he evaluates his/her actions in the light of common good. Such conflicts are possible only because s/he tries to transcend the socially given/approved perception of the moral self. In short, an individual who tries to go beyond the moral demands of an individualistic society is likely to experience conflict of conscience.

Secondly, in the Afro-Asian cultural setting conscience is said to be more community oriented; because individual is perceived as an integral part of the community. One's self is constituted by his/her belongingness to the larger group. One might truly say that such approaches represent a relational aspect of the moral self. Thus welfare of the whole group becomes the norm of moral actions. Mutual responsibility is taken as the pattern of good behaviour. This approach, however, is limited by the upper hand which the community enjoys over the individual.<sup>2</sup>

2 For initial reflections on these points I am indebted to Anand Amaladass, "Discovery of the Concept of Conscience Interculturally," Anand Amaladass,

In the above mentioned context conflict of conscience can occur whenever an individual tries to think above or ahead of the community. When one decries the 'evil' practices of the group, s/he will begin to experience the conflict of conscience, as his/her belongingness to social group is strained at least partially.

### **Conscience and Conflicting Religious Demands**

Some times one's religious duties may raise certain demands that may go against ethical duties. It may give rise to conflict of conscience. Before examining this claim, let us turn to a usually made comment that a multi-religious context can cause conflict of conscience. But I don't think so. For in forming one's conscience one might be influenced or even determined by his/her religious background or the pluralistic religious context. But a multi-religious context in itself is unlikely to constitute a conflict of conscience. Because the conscience of a really religious person, whatever be his religious affinity, will be nurtured in and supported by a particular religious tradition, not a pluralistic milieu of religions. There is an added reason to think that religious pluriformity need not cause conflict of conscience. That is, one's religious sensibility actually does not add anything content-wise to his/her morality. Rather, it may give him/her strong (religious) motivations to follow the moral demands. In the case of strictly religious demands, for example, ritual practices, liturgical observance, etc., one is driven by religious consciousness. But in such cases, one is not going to confront a conflict of conscience, if one is true to his religious tradition. So I do not find any scope for a genuine conflict of conscience for a truly religious person, thanks to the multi-religious context in which one finds oneself.

Though the scope of the conflict of conscience due to pluriform religiosity is overruled, there is a genuine chance of conflict of conscience when ethical demands do not tally with one's religious demands. It must be granted that there may not be many such cases of conflict. Without proposing any suggestions to resolve such conflict situations, I mention a couple of such instances from the bible.

Perhaps the classical scriptural example that represents a conflict of conscience which arises from the conflicting demands of religious and ethical duties is the Genesis story of Abraham being asked by Yhwh to



sacrifice his son Isaac (Gen. 22: 1-19). It must be admitted that the scripture does not present this account as an instance of conflict of conscience. But we can assume that it must have created a conflict of conscience to Abraham. Because God commanded him to sacrifice his son (religious demand) while it was forbidden ethically.<sup>3</sup> This narrative has generated great interest among many commentators. Their point of attention is that how God who is the author of life can ask Abraham to kill his own son?

Thomas Aquinas deals with Abraham's sacrifice of his son (as well as prophet Hosea's fornication) and says that those actions in themselves are wrong because they are contrary to right reason. But by doing something at God's will one is following right reason (*Summa Theologiae* II-II q. 154, a.2, ad 2). The meaning of what Aquinas says is that God who is the author of life can decide however he likes about life. One may say that this is a positivistic or nominalistic answer. It implies that God is the sole determinant of what is right and good. We find that Aquinas restates this in various parts of his writings: *Summa Theologiae* II-II 64, a. 6 ad 1; I-II, q. 100. a. 8 ad 3; I-II q. 94 a. 5 ad 2. I *Sent.* d. 47, q.1 a.4 and ad 2; IV *Sent.*, d.33, q.2, a.2, sol. 1.<sup>4</sup>

In the New Testament we find an example of a possible conflict of conscience ensuing from conflicting religious and ethical duties. In the parable of the good Samaritan (Lk 10: 30-37), the priest and the Levite might have been under religious/ritual obligations not to get ritually polluted. On the one hand, they were under the religious demand and on the other hand, they were under the ethical demand to help the man in need. The evangelist does not say that they experienced a conflict of conscience. But one may read it into the text. In this story, the priest and Levite gave weight to religious demands which prohibited them from becoming a neighbour to the fallen man.

Similar conflicts are possible in practical life. For example, conflict between the duty of Sunday worship and attending to the poor and

3 Respecting chronological sequence of the Genesis events, one can say that Abraham was not under the command "thou shall not kill." Because it was given later to Moses in the Decalogue. That is true. We are not making a strictly historical reading of the biblical narratives here.

4 For further details see John G. Milhaven, "Moral Absolutes and Thomas Aquinas," Charles E. Curran, ed., *Absolutes in Moral Theology?* (Washington: Corpus Books, 1968) 154-185.

needy; attending Holy Mass while it may cause scandal to someone else, etc. Christian tradition does not explicitly say which of the obligations must be given priority in a conflicting situation. However, the New Testament does teach that one's religiosity shall not be taken as an excuse for overlooking or violating the values of justice, charity, generosity, etc.

### Conscience and Moral Evil

Perhaps the commonest way an individual might experience conflict of conscience is when s/he is forced to choose from two contradictory obligations. When one value is safeguarded the other is destroyed. Perhaps the classical example is that of truthfulness in speech which may lead a person's conscience to conflict with other values such as privacy and preservation of fame. This poses a real conflict of conscience.

Actually the above mentioned kind of conflict of conscience means the problem of moral evil. It raises the question what we shall do when we are led to accept an option which simultaneously produces evil effects, though we do not mean them to happen. In fact, this issue raises questions regarding the moral methodologies dealing with ethically ambiguous situations. Suffice it to mention here that moral tradition has developed at least three approaches to this problem, namely, choosing the lesser evil, the principle of double effect and proportionalism. These approaches require separate treatment which we cannot afford to make here.

As part of dealing with conflicting situation of maintaining truthfulness at the expense of other values such as the right to fame, privacy, etc. moral tradition has devised a strategy called mental reservation or mental restriction. The scope of this strategy is to deal with situations in which telling truth to someone who has a right to it might lead to a greater evil. Truthfulness demands us to respect the reputation of others.

Ethical tradition has a continuing fascination for the classical dilemma in which interrogators press someone to reveal their intended victim's location.<sup>5</sup> For strategically avoiding the situation of choosing (the lesser) evil, and thus avoiding sin, moral theological tradition has developed what is called 'mental restriction.' It consists in limiting, restricting or twisting the meaning of a word spoken or keeping a part of a sentence

5 Augustine, *De Mendacium*, xiii 22-24.

in one's own mind, or by the use of words with double meaning. Almost in the same fashion, but worded differently, theologians have tried to explain why all false speeches are not lies. This has been named variously such as theories of amphiboly, mental reservations, incommunicable knowledge and material false speech.

The historical formulation of mental restriction has to be understood in its context. Augustine's two treatises, *On Lying (De Mendacio)* and *Against Lying (Contra Mendacium)*, established the standard doctrine during the Middle Ages and until the era of high casuistry. In *De Mendacio* (ch. III), he defines lying as uttering one thing by words or signs while having another thing in one's mind, with the intention to deceive.<sup>6</sup> Augustine, after considering various arguments pro and contra, concluded that possible good consequences could never justify a deliberate lie: "Since by lying eternal life is lost. Never for any man's temporal life must a lie be told."<sup>7</sup> Aquinas continued the basic Augustinian thought about lying. In *ST II-II*, q. 110, a. 3 Aquinas reviews six arguments given to justify lying and then he rejects them. These arguments reflect the thirteenth century ways to deal with difficult situations, for example, to avert a greater evil. However, Aquinas added an apparently simple comment that made a big difference in later casuistic discussions. "One may, however, prudently mask the truth as Augustine explains."<sup>8</sup> It consisted in saying something while keeping a qualification in mind, which saves the speaker from uttering a lie. For example, to the question do you have money, one can say "no," mentally restricting, "not for you". The Augustinian solution to practical situations, was to keep quiet; but if one is compelled to speak, he can speak in ambiguous terms. For instance, in Latin *non est hic* can mean "he is not here" or "he does not eat here." This example demonstrates how an attempt to confront an ambiguous situation, in which the maxim of choosing the lesser evil was at stake, gave way to a strategic position of mental restriction as a means to keep one's conscience clean. In other words, mental restriction does not really engage the ambiguous situation of revealing the truth, causing another person some kind of harm.<sup>9</sup> One can say that mental

6 Augustine cites pertinent scriptural texts,

7 St. Augustine, *De Mendacio*, ch. IX.

8 Thomas Aquinas, *ST II-II* 110, art 3, ad 4.

9 For a contemporary theological appraisal of the issues involved in lying, Julia Fleming, "The Ethics of Lying in Contemporary Moral Theology: Strategies for Stimulating the Discussion," *Louvain Studies* 24 (1999) 57-71.

restriction does functionally the same thing as a lie: deliberately leading a person to draw a conclusion which the speaker knows will be false.

Apart from the traditional approach, and as part of dealing with an action the adoption of which causes evil, moral theologians such as Louis Janssens and Richard McCormick have developed the distinction between premoral evil and moral evil. Very simply, premoral evil is any kind of evil which is caused by a human being but without directly willing it to occur. Among the category of premoral/non-moral evil comes physical evil such as ignorance, sickness and death. Premoral/non-moral evil is damaging at least in a physical sense to the human person. A premoral evil becomes moral evil when it is committed by a person without sufficient (proportionate) reason. Moral evil destroys our humanity and in so doing it breaks our relationship with God.<sup>10</sup>

The above made explanation may leave a question open, namely, how to decide whether we are committing a premoral evil or a moral evil? It is surely by analysing the situation. Scriptural revelation, teachings of the church, theological wisdom, and human experience, etc. will help us discern an act as right or wrong. In addition to this, we have to consider the total reality of the act, including the intention of the agent, the circumstances in which the act is placed and the foreseeable consequences of the act. After considering these factors, if one has sufficient reason, s/he may place that act which causes also evil effects which are not directly willed. However, the expression "sufficient reason" (or proportionate reason) is very crucial.

Richard McCormick gives six criteria for determining a sufficient reason in placing an act which causes evil effects also.

One has to 'weigh the social implications' of the act under consideration. To do that, one needs to weigh the action's consequences for him/herself and others. It is true that not every implication or consequence of the act can be foreseen always. So an earnest consideration must be made to a humanly possible extent.

One has to 'use the test of generalizability.' While faced with a problem one might be forced to think of him/herself as absolutely unique. But one has to recognize his/her essentially shared humanity. The point is that one needs to ask oneself what would happen if the chosen act becomes a norm for all.

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10 Richard A. McCormick, *Notes on Moral Theology 1965 Through 1980* (Washington, D.C.: Univ. Press of America, 1981) 710.



One has to consider the 'cultural influences' which might bias his/her judgment about the sufficient reason.

One has to make use of the 'wisdom of past human experience.' For doing this, one needs to respect the given laws and the theological tradition regarding each issue as far as possible.

One has to be aware of one's own self-interest which might influence one's judgment. So to avoid this risk, one has to consult others who have special expertise and insight.

One has to depend on one's religious beliefs. They may enlighten persons facing moral dilemma. One shall not exclusively depend on ethical norms. They must be complemented by religious beliefs.<sup>11</sup>

An overview of the above said steps may give the impression that it is a kind of weighing the effects of the act or a quantitative exercise by adding and subtracting consequences. But in fact McCormick rightly calls it a process of discernment. One cannot make an individualistic decision regarding the sufficient reason to cause premoral evil. For one always acts and decides as member of a community. It being so, one needs to make extensive consultation with tradition, authority, various experts and people sensitive to human experience.<sup>12</sup> This short account represents one proposed way of dealing with a situation in which one is left to choose a good act which simultaneously causes unintended evils.

### **Conscience and Conflicting Demands of Authority, Formal and Material Norms**

A Christian is supposed to have a well-formed conscience. The formation of conscience is done by his/her diligent attention to the sources of Christian morality and faith. We need to depend on Scripture and tradition and various kinds of authorities for the formation of conscience. Ultimately it will help one to make proper discernment of the right course of action. Thus scripture, teachings of the church and human experience, etc. play a vital role in the formation of conscience. In that sense they can be qualified as sources of moral authority. But a conflict arises when one's well-formed conscience finds it really difficult to follow the demands of the sources of authority after many sincere attempts or searches. It poses a situation of a real conflict of conscience. In such

11 Richard A. McCormick, *Ambiguity in Moral Choice*, 85-90.

12 For details see Kenneth R. Overberg, *Conscience in Conflict: How to Make Moral Choices* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1998) 30.

contexts, usually one is supposed to continue sincere and responsible search of moral truth. But ultimately one has to abide by his/her well-formed conscience. One shall not violate his/her conscience.

There is another kind of, conflict of conscience possible when the end and the means chosen do not concur with each other. It is true that the question whether the ends justify the means is a long debated one in Christian ethics. Some approaches to ethics, for example, the teleological methodology, cautiously assumes that the end justifies the means in making moral decisions, provided there are proportionate reasons. For example, mutilation is an evil. But if that is found as the only means to safeguard life, it could be allowed. The (good) end of saving life justifies the (evil) means of mutilation. It does not, however, mean that one can choose any means to achieve any end in a wanton fashion. But deontological approaches reject the above said position, judging that one has to look always to duty as the norm of good acts, not towards the end as such.

Despite the air of technical description attached to the approaches of both teleology and deontology, many people in practical life often experience deep conflicts of conscience. For example, a married couple serious about responsible parenthood have to control the size of their family and space births. But what must be the means adopted for this purpose? The church admits only the natural means of birth control. But if they cannot practise it successfully after making many serious and responsible attempts, they are likely to experience a conflict of conscience. Still worse is the case when the husband is irresponsible both in personal life and sexual behaviour and the wife is to take appropriate means to regulate her fertility. If the husband does not cooperate, no attempt of natural means of birth control shall succeed and it will inevitably result in unwanted pregnancies. In this case, the wife is all the more likely to experience conflict of conscience.

Yet another kind of conflicting situation can occur when a moral agent discerns what to do in a particular and concrete context. The answer to such moral situations is expressed in different kinds of moral norms. One can rightly say that such moral norms address two fundamental questions: 'What ought I to do?' and 'What ought I to be?' The former deals with actions or what we have to do; they are called material norms. The latter deals with our essential human characteristic or what I have to be. They could be called formal norms.

But the transition from a formal to a material norm can generate chances of conflicts of conscience. Let us take the case of the formal norm 'do not kill.' Based on human experience, faith and value of human life, taking of another's life is considered an evil. But is it an absolute norm which justifiably allows no exceptions? No. For some situations may justify the taking of another's life. For example, in just war, capital punishment (though still debated), self-defence, etc. Such exceptions emphasize the challenge to discern rightly the conflicting values in the concrete situation. If you do not opt for exceptions to the norm against killing, the next possibility is that you be killed at least in extreme situations. So it may open a conflicting option between killing or being killed. Not all situations may create such grave conflicting options. However, the chances of conflicts cannot be overruled whenever one makes use of exceptions.

### Conclusion

The main purpose of this paper has been to expose the manifold ways in which one may confront conflicts of conscience. This attempt represents what an activist, who is involved with the moral deliberations of other people at least to some extent, perceives in conflicts. Hence, I have not tried to propose any solutions to address such conflict situations. I believe that is the work of moral theologians. The treatment of four areas as four grounds of conflict situation does not mean that there are no more such areas. I have identified only the most prominent ones. This attempt shows that ethical decision-making need not always be a smooth process with mathematical precision. It cannot be reduced to one's conformity or non-conformity to the objective demands of moral norms. It is much more complex. For the moral agent is always bound to respect his/her inviolable (well-formed) conscience as the subjective core of a moral person in taking moral decisions.

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# The Hindu Religious Perspective of Conscience

Baiju Julian

*The Hindu Religious Perspectives of Conscience* is the topic discussed by Baiju Julian who teaches Moral Theology at St. Joseph's Pontifical Institute, Aluva. The article tries to expose the progressive understanding of the concept of the "Inner Controller" based on the teachings of the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, and *Bhagavadgita*. The Vedic concept of *rta* as the truth in course of time got corrupted by vedic ritualism. Upanishadic concept of God within is predominant. The realization of being one with God is the human ideal. Only one who has always resisted evil ways can reach the Self through right knowledge. According to Gita every good soul can realise God as his/her inmost Self.

## Introduction

Hinduism is perhaps the oldest of all the living religions. It has neither any definite date of its origin nor has it any definite founder associated with it. It has its foundations on the spiritual experiences of seers of Vedas and Upanishads.<sup>1</sup> They are the source of Hindu *dharma*. It is according to the *dharma*, that the human performs his/her actions which would shape and sustain his/her life. "The eternal dream of the human heart, the aspiration of the soul to come to its own, is the basis of the Hindu dharma"<sup>2</sup> The seers taught that the Supreme Reality is One, *Ekam Sat* of which the learned speak variously.<sup>3</sup>

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- 1 Cf. Radhakrishnan S., *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 1, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 63.
  - 2 Radhakrishnan S., *Hindu View of Life*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1924, p. 45.
  - 3 Cf. Radhakrishnan S., *Indian Philosophy*, p. 94



Based on the teachings of *Upanishads*, two equally important philosophical systems of Samkara's *Advaita* and Ramanuja's *Visistadvaita*, the former being an exquisite example of absolute monism and the latter of a full-fledged theism, have later captured the Hindu religious mind. The former speaks of God as an attributeless Absolute (*Nirguna Brahman*), while the latter takes God as the Lord, the 'Inner controller' who indwells the entire cosmos. This God is not a *God* of the Vedas, but *the God*, the only Supreme being, omnipotent, omniscient and the ruler of this entire universe. This God is called here the *saguna Brahman*.<sup>4</sup> It is the latter view assisted by the theism of the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavadgita* which has a mass impact and has captured the minds of the Hindu milieu. The former has proved to be a great Hindu philosophy, but as a religion the latter has gained more ground. This article tries to expose the progressive understanding of the concept of 'Inner controller' based on the teachings of the *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and *Bhagavadgita*.

### General concept of Conscience

One of the basic truths of this religion is that the human is in essence one with God and is spiritual: "that the meaning and purpose of life is that God has forgotten himself into man, and man should remember himself into God again; that the spirit has entered into..."<sup>5</sup> Radhakrishnan writes: "...even the humblest individual has the spark of the spirit in him which the mightiest empire cannot crush. Rooted in one life, we are all fragments of the divine, sons of immortality".<sup>6</sup> The *Upanishads* teach the identity between the spirit or Self (*Atman*) in the human with the Universal Spirit or Self (*Brahman*). And the Absolute principle of the universe, *Brahman* has its concrete expression in the human's deepest self, *Atman*.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the human is a complex multi-dimensional being, including within different elements of matter, life, consciousness, intelligence and the divine spark."<sup>8</sup>

4 Cf. K.N. Tiwari, *Comparative Religion*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1987, p.14.

5 Bhagavan Das, *Essential Unity of All Religions*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1990, p. 122.

6 Radhakrishnan S., *Religion and Society*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1948, p. 66.

7 Radhakrishnan S., *Principal Upanishads*, George Allen and Unwin, 1953, p.77.

8 Radhakrishnan S., *Bhagavadgita (trans.)* George Allen and Unwin, 1948, p.46.

The Christian would know this divine spark as conscience, intuition, inner Monitor, the still small Voice of God etc. Hindu *dharma* refers to it as *Antaryamini*, Inner Monitor, Watcher, Ruler, Endo-censor. Manu describes it: "That which the Heart permits; which the "Soul" likes; The 'God within' approves; the 'Mind' holds pure; The 'Eternal witness' sees as free from doubt, Without misgiving, as straight-forward course; Which brings pure satisfaction to the 'Self'; Which the good mind rejoices in, while doing; that is the course to follow, for good humans. In matters wrapped in doubt, 'to do or not'. The 'Inner Organ' of the good is guide."<sup>9</sup>

*Mahabharatha* describes: Adi-parva, cha. 98 : "Why know'st thou not the witness in thy heart? Why slightest thou that Blessed Guide within? He who ignores and does not satisfy, But disobeys, the One, auspicious, pure, Perpetual 'Inner Witness', the 'Own-self', The 'Ancient Sage', all knowing, who abides in every heart, recording every act, Him Yama doth award dire punishment."<sup>10</sup>

*Dharma*, thus, is the inner nature, inner voice or ruler which helps an individual to realise its spiritual end. Moral life and moral action are valued according to this "inner witness" which is also called as the law of God.

### In the Vedas

Moral life in the *Vedas* speaks of our duties to the gods and to fellow beings. The former would be seen in rites and rituals and the latter would be seen in human relationships. "Prayers are to be offered to the gods. Rites are to be performed. The *Vedas* assume a very close and intimate relationship between humans and gods. The life of the human has to be led under the very eye of God. Apart from the duties owed to gods there are also duties to others. Kindness to all is enjoyed; hospitality is reckoned a great virtue. Sorcery, witchcraft, seduction and adultery are condemned as vicious. Gambling is denounced. Virtue is conformity with the law of God, which includes love of fellow beings. Vice is disobedience to this law".<sup>11</sup>

9 *Manu* (trans.), quoted by Bhagavan Das in *Essential Unity of All Religions*, p.139.

10 *Mahabharatha*, Adi parva , chap. 98.

11 Radhakrishnan S., *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 1, p. 110.

In almost all the hymns to *Varuna*, the moral God of *Vedas*, we find prayers for the forgiveness of sin, filled with confessions of guilt and repentance.<sup>12</sup> "The mighty Lord on high, our deeds, as if at hand espies: "The gods know all we do, though we would fain our deeds disguise... Whoever two together plot, and deem they are alone, King Varuna is there, a third, and all their schemes are known".<sup>13</sup>

Another hymn expresses: "If we have sinned against the one who loves us, have ever wronged friend or comrade, have ever done an injury to a neighbour, who ever dwelt with us or even to a stranger, O Lord, free us from the guilt of this trespass".<sup>14</sup> Thus the *Vedic* prayers show us that the moral consciousness of the *Vedic* people. Virtues consist in obeying God's law and loving one's neighbour, whereas vice is disobeying God's law and injuring one's fellow-beings. This is a general moral statement. There are no set ethical rules, but one knows by his moral intuition what is right and wrong because they harm the neighbour. He does not argue them but perceives them to be wrong because he knows in his own heart that what he intends by these actions is evil.<sup>15</sup> Thus the 'inner voice' which is the law of *rta* pervades the entire universe and it resounds in all human beings. In *Vedic* period the adjective "good is attributed to those who act in accordance with this law of universal morality. And the moral conscience was intimately connected with the worship of God. Though the notion of conscience was not developed in the *Vedic* hymns, there was clear indication that when wrong is done, they considered it as something done against the Will of God. That Will was felt innate in the deepest of one's heart. However, this *Vedic* concept of *rta* as the truth of things and as slandered of morality in course of time gets contaminated with Vedic ritualism.<sup>16</sup>

### In the Upanishads

The concept of 'God within' is predominant in the *Upanishadic* teachings. "The realisation of being one with God is the human ideal ... The absolute is the deliberate goal of the finite Self"<sup>17</sup> Against this ideal is seen the moral meaning of one's action. When one acts with the intention of realising this supreme ideal, i.e., according to the voice of

12 Ibid. 13. *Adharva Veda*, iv, 16, 1. 14. *Rig Veda*, 85, 7.

15 Cf. Aloysius M., *Radhakrishnan on Hindu moral life and action*, Concept Publishing company, Delhi, 1978, p. 33.

16 Radhakrishnan S., *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 1, p. 147. 17. Ibid., p. 207.

one's conscience, one affirms the real and the universal and thus one is in the process of becoming the true Self. When one affirms the finite Self and not listening to 'inward dweller', one acts against the only valid ideal, one acts immorally. "One is responsible for one's acts. Evil is the free act of the individual who uses his freedom for his own exaltation... Evil is the result of our alienation from the Real".<sup>18</sup>

The *Upanishads* teach that to reach God, one must give up one's ways and undergo ethical purification and discipline. "Not he who has not desisted from evil ways... can reach this (self) through right knowledge."<sup>19</sup> To attain to the saving knowledge and truth, we must overcome our vices and cleanse our souls. Thus this ethical purification and discipline is considered as means of the formation of conscience.

Radhakrishnan says that purgation is nothing but ethical preparation. "Until our mind and heart are effectively purged, we can have no clear vision of God."<sup>20</sup> This ethical preparation consists of control of passion and practice of spiritual renunciation, and the fourfold *ashramas* with their distinct ethical demands, aims and practices. Any human action can be termed a virtue when it steers clear of passion and is governed by the dictates of the voice of God. Action in passion is vice. The characteristics of the quality of passion are "...bewilderment, fear, depression, sleepiness, sloth, grief, anger, cruelty, rashness, pride...".<sup>21</sup>

By overcoming the tendency towards vice, one opens oneself for virtue. That is why the *Upanishads* strongly advise the practice of negative virtues such as *brahmacharya* and *tapas*, *mauna* and meditation. This self-discipline has inward and outward dimension. It not only implies mortification, sexual abstinence and a life of poverty freely chosen but includes such exercises as self-examination and 'prayers offered in the heart'<sup>22</sup>. *Chandogya Upanishad* (II, 23), *Taittiriya Upanishad* (I, 11, 1-3) and *Bṛhad-aranyaka Upanishad* exhort to practise virtues especially the practice of three virtues of self control, giving gifts to others and compassion. Thus we can conclude that the virtuous one possesses a well-formed conscience. He follows the prompting of the 'inward dweller'. He will formulate his judgement according to reason and not out of passion. Passion is won through the process of self-discipline.

18 Radhakrishnan S., *Principal Upanishads*, p. 104.

19 *Katha Upanishads*, I, 2, 24.

20 Radhakrishnan S., *Principal Upanishads*, p. 104.

21 *Maitri Upanishads*, III, 5.

22 Radhakrishnan S., *Principal Upanishads*, p. 109.



The law of *dharma* is employed to characterise the nature of the 'inward dweller'. Thus, according to the teaching of *Upanishads*, one who follows the voice of the law of *dharma* will enjoy peace of heart.

### In the Bhagavadgita

According to Bhagavadgita God is not merely immanent in contingent beings such as sun, moon, and earth but dwells in the bodies of men, even evil men. "One who seeks me with heart resolved, will surely find me, the inmost Self".<sup>23</sup> A virtuous human is one who is aware of this spiritual union and preserves the light of the divine nature. A pure conscience implies, thus, fearlessness, purity of mind, charity, self-control and sacrifice, freedom from malice and excessive pride.<sup>24</sup> But there are three deadly sins; lust, anger and greed.<sup>25</sup> According to *Gita*, they darken the light in the human.

Of the three deadly sins, *kama* is the most pernicious. Arjuna is puzzled by the fact that the human seems to be forced to commit sin. But the Blessed Lord says: "This is craving, this is wrath, born of the mode of passion, all devouring and most sinful, know this to be the enemy here".<sup>26</sup> "*Kama* is "all devouring and most sinful"<sup>27</sup> "an insatiable fire", and "the constant foe of the wise",<sup>28</sup> "sinful destroyer of wisdom and discrimination".<sup>29</sup> *Manu* says: "Desire is never satisfied by the enjoyment of the objects of desire; it grows more and more as does the fire to which fuel is added".<sup>30</sup>

In order to keep the heart pure and not contaminated by these deadly sins, following earlier Hindu tradition, *Gita* commands us to practise virtues of asceticism and penance, renunciation and detachment.<sup>31</sup> They are performed primarily as a means of purification. We are "purified by the austerity of wisdom".<sup>32</sup> The performances are performed only in view of God. Those who seek God perform the various acts of sacrifice, penance and giving gifts without the expectation of reward<sup>33</sup>. Against this transcendental purpose must be placed the penances we undertake.<sup>34</sup>

Three kinds of penance are mentioned in the *Gita*: The penance of the body, of the speech, and of the mind. The penance of the body consists in purity, uprightness, continence (*brahmacharya*) and non-

23 *Bhagavadgita*, XVI, 18. 24. *Ibid*, XVI 1-3. 25. *Ibid*, XVI 21.

26. *Ibid*, III, 37. 27. *Ibid*. 28. *Ibid*., III, 39. 29. *Ibid*., III, 41.

30 *Manu* ii, 94. quoted by Radhakrishnan in *the Bhagavadgita* p. 148.

31 *Bhagavadgita*, III, 41, 42. 32. *Ibid*., IV, 10. 33. *Ibid*., XVII, 25.

34 Cf. Aloysius M., *Radhakrishnan on Hindu moral life and action*, Concept Publishing company, Delhi, 1978, p. 60.

violence (*ahimsa*). The penance of speech consists in not giving offences to others in speech, being truthful and pleasant, and in reciting the *Vedas*. Penance of the mind consists in serenity and purity of mind, gentleness, silence and self-control. Thus through the practice of these penances, *Gita* advocates that the purity and uprightness of the inner self or conscience can be preserved and the state beyond all work can be reached through means of purification.<sup>35</sup> "With the mind firmly set on the way of renunciation, thou shalt become free and attain to Me".<sup>36</sup>

Thus, we have seen in *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, and in *Bhagavadgita*, the basic inspiration from the complex idea of *dharma* which is described as 'inward Ruler', *Antaryamin*, inner Spirit. Hindu ethics, thus, teach that one must seek the will of this inward Ruler which is expressed in the divine law which is *dharma*. It is the *dharma* that specifies how we ought to act or ought not to act and it gives rules, rules of virtues and vices. Virtue commands certain actions and vices command avoidance of certain other actions. From the *Vedas* we can formulate the following rules: offer prayers to God; perform religious rites; be kind and hospitable; do not commit sorcery; do not commit adultery. Duty to God and to one's neighbour is specified in the simple rules formulated from the Vedic moral discourse.

From the *Upanishads* we can formulate the following rules: practice self-control, be chaste, practise *mauna* (silence), i.e., avoid heresy, backbiting and flattery; do not yield to anger and hatred, envy and jealousy, covetousness and gluttony, lust and passion, rashness and meanness, ambitiousness, acquisitiveness and family pride; do not be attached to pleasant objects and averse to unpleasant objects; be truthful; be generous and compassionate to others and give generously with faith and sympathy; be merciful to others, revere your father, mother and the guest. From the *Bhagavadgita* we can formulate the following rules: practise self-control, concentration and asceticism; cultivate tranquillity and steadfastness; be fearless; be upright and pure in mind; be charitable; do not indulge in finding fault with others; do not covet other's goods; do not be arrogant, self-conceited and ostentatious; avoid deadly sins of lust, anger and greed; perform your duties without the motive of rewards.<sup>37</sup>

The content of the rules has three aspects: they refer to oneself, to one's neighbour, and to God. It can be summed up in the golden rule:

35 *Bhagavadgita*, XVIII, 49.

36. *Ibid.*, IX, 28.

37 Cf. Aloysius M., *Radhakrishnan on Hindu Moral Life and Action*, pp. 64-65.

love of God and love of neighbour. It is the highest virtue. It can be asserted that the Hindu religion advocates the practice of the Golden Rule as the criteria and the standard norm for the formation of conscience. Radhakrishnan says: "Know this to be the essence of *dharma*, then practice it; refrain from doing unto others what you will not have done unto yourself." "We should not do to others what will be offensive to us... The virtues incumbent on all are non-hatred to all beings in thought, word and deed, good will and charity".<sup>38</sup>

This golden rule implies charity or love (*dana*), non-injury (*ahimsa*). They respect one's neighbour and his conscience. "Thou shall not slay, neither men nor animals". It is the highest law, the only law worthy of the human".<sup>39</sup> When one finds it difficult to take a right judgement faced with different choices, the action becomes right and good if it is in accordance with the golden rule.

### Conclusion

The underlying principles of Hindu religion in its multi dimensions are: we are spiritual and in our inner self God abides; our soul is the Supreme Soul. We must live in this world with this spiritual awareness. We should not contaminate our inner self by doing vices, rather through the practice of virtues we must reach perfect spiritual union. The voice of this 'God within' or Inner Ruler is a touchstone God has placed in every heart. It separates, with surety, False from True. It is felt directly in the heart and is innate. The teaching of Bhagavadgita illuminates this concept in a lucid and direct way. A deep study of the words of *Gita* could be of great use for a Hindu to understand clearly the meaning of 'moral conscience'. It cannot be overlooked that a deeper similarity can be drawn between the Hindu perspective of conscience with the Catholic understanding of it. The second Vatican teaches: "Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, sounds in his heart at the right moment... For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God... His conscience is man's most secret core and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths".<sup>40</sup>

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38 Radhakrishnan S., *The Heart of Hindustan*, G. A. Natesan and Co., Chennai, 1936., 21.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 23. 40 . The Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 16.

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## *Jeevadhara*

The sub-title of *Jeevadhara* has been: *a Journal of Christian Interpretation*. Yet nobody would deny that it has been broad in its scope and outlook. Its readers and contributors include not only Christians but also those who are not Christians and even those who profess no religion. Everything human falls within its purview.

Hereafter *Jeevadhara*'s sub-title is: *a Journal of Socio-Religious Research*. Hence it has to be still broader in its scope and outlook and more *secular*. The word *secular*, apart from its dictionary meaning here implies that *seculum* is the sphere of God's presence and purpose. The universe and everything therein are inter-related. Once this inter-relationship is lost it falls apart and integrates. We cannot distinguish between sciences as strictly sacred and secular. That would be denying God's purposeful presence in everything. The greatest danger in our world of specialization today is losing sight of this inter-relationship and harmony of everything in the universe, everything in nature, everything in the human.

Our vision is a new humanity with justice and freedom for all. Religions, philosophies, sciences, technologies and all human endeavours should join hands in creating this new humanity.

Analytical Indexes of Subjects in *Jeevadhara*, English & Malayalam, Vols I - XXX (1971 - 2000) are published and copies of it will be sent to all our subscribers.